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FALL 1993 / Volume Five, Issue 3/4

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WORDS FROM THE EDITOR

RICHARD T. CHIZMAR

CEMETERY DANCE #17/18 — Welcome back to another issue of *Cemetery Dance*, the bestselling magazine of dark mystery, suspense, and horror. If you have picked us up from a book or specialty store and are reading us for the first time . . . we hope you enjoy this Double Issue enough to subscribe or keep an eye open for the Winter Issue, due in retail stores in January.



Why is this a Double Issue?

It's a long story—so don't ask. Just kidding. It is a long and boring story, though, so I'll just give you the bottom line: due to a unfortunate delay caused by a First Class, but ultimately blameless, mistake (not our's, I might add), and an agreement with our various distributors that it was the most practical action to take, we decided it wiser to release one spectacular Double Issue *right on our normal schedule*, rather than release a late Summer Issue and then an on-time Fall Issue. We've published each and every issue of *Cemetery Dance* (16 issues spanning over four years) right on schedule and it's a hard habit to break!

Why didn't I have to pay extra for the issue?

The purpose of this issue is two-fold. First, it allows us to get our publication schedule back in whack. Secondly, it gives us an opportunity to publish an issue that will reward (in many ways) our various supporters—readers who buy us from retail outlets, long-time and brand new subscribers, and the actual retailers, themselves. For our subscribers, I've already sent out a letter to each and every person, explaining my decision and presenting them with a special offer. For non-subscribers and retailers: the cover price stays the same, giving readers a wonderful bargain and retailers an excellent issue to sell like crazy, because of the low price.

So what's inside this Double Issue?

Well, to start, there's several dozen extra pages. And there would have been even more . . . but our printer would have killed us! To be more specific, here's the lineup:

Not only do we have all the regular feature columns (and believe me when I say that the columnists are in top form), but we also have a wonderful interview with one of the hottest young authors in horror—Poppy Z. Brite. Plus this issue contains more reviews than any single issue of *Cemetery Dance*—books, videos, chapbooks, audio tapes, comics, and even role-playing horror games!

And then there's the fiction. Powerhouse short stories by the likes of Thomas Tessier, Ray Garton, Nancy Holder, Peter Crowther and Larry Segriff. A stunning novella by *CD* regular, Gary Braunbeck. And to wrap it up: a brilliant two-chapter novel excerpt from *Slippin' Into Darkness*, the debut novel by Bram Stoker winner, Norman Partridge. (By the way, we will be publishing this novel in a few short weeks as a *CD Publications* hardcover. It's a dark suspense masterpiece, and we're only doing a 500 copy signed edition [at \$35.00], so you'd be nuts to miss out on a copy!)



That's all for now. Thanks for taking a look at this issue of *CD*. We think (hope) you will enjoy it! And please remember that Ingram Periodicals is *Cemetery Dance's* newsstand distributor. If you frequent a chain store—yes, any chain store—or an independent book or comic store, please ask the manager to carry *Cemetery Dance*. Every little bit helps. Thanks—we appreciate your help!

Now turn down the light just a notch, flip the page, take my hand, and start the dance . . .

RUSTLE

PETER CROWTHER

PETER CROWTHER's short stories, poetry, reviews, and interviews have appeared or are scheduled to appear in *Borderlands 4*, *Cat Crimes 3*, *Grails 2*, *Santa Clues*, *Million*, *Mystery Scene* and a dozen other publications. Well-respected as an anthology editor (*Narrow Houses*), Crowther is also the author of the novel, *Escardy Gap*, co-written with James Lovegrove. He lives in Harrogate, England, with his wife and two sons. "Rustle" is one of the creepiest tales to ever appear in these pages.

"Okay, where do we start?"

The man shrugged. "You tell me."

"Why don't you try to tell me what it's like."

"Tell you what it's like?"

"Yes."

"What *what's* like?"

"This other room."

"Well . . . it's a room. It's just . . . a room."

"You say it's just a room: what kind of room?"

"Kind of room?"

"Yes, is it a bedroom? Is it a—"

"No, it's not a bedroom. Not exactly."

"Not exactly? What do you mean by 'not exactly'?"

"There's no bed in it."

"Right. No bed. But you said 'not exactly'. Why?"

"There are things in there."

"Things?"

"Yeah, sleeping things."

"There are sleeping things in the other room?"

He nodded.

"What . . . like pajamas? Sheets? What?"

"No." A trace of exasperation. "Things!"

"Tell me what kind of things."

"I don't *know* what kind of things. I've not seen them. I've told you, I don't go in there."

"So how do you know there are things in there?"

"I've heard them."

"Doing what? Talking?"

The man giggled. "No, not talking."

"What then?"

"Sleeping."

"You've heard them sleeping?"

Another nod.

"What . . . like breathing? Snoring?"

"Yeah. Well . . . breathing, you know, breathing heavy . . . like you do when you're asleep."

The doctor looked over at the policeman. The policeman shrugged. The man between them rocked slowly, back and forth, his hands clasped between his knees.

"So when do you hear them, these things?"

He hesitated and then said, "When I take them a girl."

Doctor Malloy scribbled something on his pad.

"How many girls have you taken them, Edward?"

The man sitting at the back of the room uncrossed and re-crossed his legs, the material of his uniform rustling in the stillness of the interview room.

The doctor looked up and leaned to the side, shaking his head. "I would rather you just let me talk to Edward, Inspector."

The policeman sighed and settled back on his chair.

"Can you answer that, Edward? Can you answer the Inspector's question? Can you tell me how many girls you've taken into the room?"

He sighed. "I've told you, I don't—"

"I know, I know . . . you don't go in the room."

"Right."

"So, how many girls have you taken into *your* room?"

"Eleven."

"Eleven girls?"

"Yeah. Eleven."

"You sound very sure."



"I am. I keep count."

The doctor made a note of Edward's use of the present tense and said, "When do you take them?"

"When? Like what time?"

"No, I mean how often."

"It varies."

"Why does it vary, Edward?"

"It varies because it depends on when they want another one."

"They' being the sleeping things, the things you haven't seen?"

"Yeah."

"They let you know when they want another one?"

The man nodded and looked around the room.

"How do they let you know that?"

"The room appears."

Doctor Malloy removed his glasses and pulled a handkerchief out of his trouser pocket, started to clean the lenses. "The whole room—just appears?"

"No, just the door."

"A door appears? All by itself?"

"Yeah."

"Where does it appear, this door? What is it like?"

"It's just a door. It's purple. A purple door. And it appears in different places. Sometimes it appears in the sitting room, sometimes in my bedroom. One time it appeared in the kitchen while I was cooking."

"The door just appears by itself? No walls attached to it?"

"Yeah, by itself." He chuckled. "You can walk right around it, right around the back." His face suddenly lit up and he chuckled again. "Like . . . like Doctor Who's telephone box."

"Is there anything around the other side?"

"No, there's just the door."

Doctor Malloy replaced his glasses and then tore a sheet of paper from his pad. He held out the sheet of paper to the man. The man accepted the sheet and looked questioningly. "I want you to draw me the door."

"Why?"

The question came back so fast that it surprised him. "Just draw me the door, Edward."

"I don't have a pencil."

The policeman rose to his feet slowly and removed a button-topped Biro pen from his jacket pocket. "He can have this," he said. The doctor nodded and Edward turned around to accept the pen.

As the man began to sketch, Doctor Malloy said, "Over how long have you been taking the girls?"

"Mmmm . . . ? About two months. Maybe three."

"Where do you get them?"

"From outside. From the streets. Nobody misses them."

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"You persuade them to go back to your apartment?"

The man nodded without looking up. "Yeah."

"Do you take them back to have sex?"

The man stopped drawing and stared at the paper.

"I said—"

"I heard you."

"Well?"

"I suppose that's what they think we're going to do."

"And do you?"

"No!"

"Where are the girls now, Edward?"

"I told you, they're in the room. Behind the door." He threw the paper across at Doctor Malloy and tossed the pen over his shoulder at the policeman. "There!"

Doctor Malloy picked up the paper and looked at the carefully drawn door. It was like any door, a round handle, beading surrounding four inlaid panels, and a number between the two upper panels. The number was 17.

"This is very good, Edward."

The man did not respond.

"What's the number?"

"Seventeen."

"Yes, I can see that it's seventeen. What does it mean?"

"Mean?"

"Did you ever live in a house that had the number seventeen?"

The man thought for a minute and then shook his head.

"You're sure? When you were a child, maybe?"

"I'm sure."

Doctor Malloy slid the sheet into his pad. "So, you take the girls back to your room and then what?"

The man clenched his lips like a little boy trying to hold his breath.

"Do they see the door?"

"Of course they see the door!"

"And you open it and send them in?"

"Yeah."

"Do they go—do they struggle? Do you have to push them?"

"No. They just step inside."

"Don't they think that it's strange, you asking them to step through a door that's just standing in the middle of the apartment?"

He shrugged. "They haven't said so. I think maybe they've had stranger requests."

"What is it like inside the other room?"

"I—I haven't been all the way in."

"But you told us that you took girls *into* the room, Edward."

"I meant I took them *up* to the room. Not inside, just up to it."

"Have you never been inside at all?"

"Once."

"Is it different than the part of your own room that's around the other side of the door?"

The man nodded enthusiastically.

"So it's kind of like a magician's door?"

"Yeah, like a magician's door. That's just what it's like, yeah."

"How far did you go inside?"

The man's eyes opened wide and his bottom lip began to tremble slightly. "Nuhvurfah," he mumbled through clenched teeth.

"I'm sorry, I didn't catch that."

"I said, not very far."

"What's it like in there?"

"Dark. It's very dark. And big."

"Big? How big?"

"I don't know how big. But it is big. It stretches into the distance. And it smells."

"What of? What does it smell of, Edward?"

The man stared at the doctor. His eyes seemed faraway, lost in thought. "Dirt," he said at last. "It smells of dirt—you know . . ." He waved his hands around and then clasped them tightly together. "And it smells of . . . of blood and warmth."

"Blood, you say. What does the blood smell like?"

"It smells like blood. How else—"

"No, I mean do you think it smells of blood because you know that there's blood in there?"

He shook his head emphatically. "No, I told you. I've only been in there once and I couldn't really see much."

"But you could see *something*?"

"Yeah."

"What could you see?"

"Shapes. Moving around."

"You saw these shapes when you went into the room by yourself?"

"Yeah."

"Do you see them when you put the girls into the room?"

He shook his head.

"Do the girls see the shapes?"

He shrugged. "They don't say anything if they do."

"You put them inside the door and then what happens?"

"The door closes."

"Do you close the door?"

"No."

"The girls?"

He narrowed his eyes and considered. "No, I don't think so."

"Do the shapes close the door?"

"They must."

"These shapes: what exactly are they like?"

The man shuddered involuntarily.

"Don't—Don't worry, now. Just take your time. Try to describe them to me."

"Heaps." It sounded like hiccups.

"Heaps?"

"Piles of clothes . . . washing."

"So, just blobs of . . . of material?"

He nodded. And then pointed quickly to a point on the floor behind where the doctor was sitting. "There," he said, "like that."

For a second, Doctor Malloy felt completely disorientated, so that, when he turned around, the grey and lifeless bundle on the floor some four or five feet to his side looked for all the world like one of the sentient and malevolent entities that the man had described. The thing seemed to hug the ground as if reluctant to leave . . . or, maybe, preparing to pounce.

But it wasn't a blob or a creeping thing. It was the crumpled raincoat that he had dropped across the chair behind the door on his way in. He swivelled around and looked at the door. There was the chair. There was nothing on it.

He looked back to the coat. It was some eight or ten feet from the door. He was sure he hadn't just dropped it on the floor. It was most unlike him if he had.

"Did you move my coat?" he said, turning his attention to the policeman at the back of the room.

The policeman frowned and jabbed a finger at himself. "Me? No, Doctor. Not guilty I'm afraid."

He looked at Edward. "Did you move my coat, Edward?"

The man shook his head fiercely.

Doctor Malloy shrugged.

The air conditioning gave the slightest rustling sound, like a cloth being pulled across something, being pulled away to reveal . . .

"And then what happens?"

"What happens when?" The man seemed puzzled by the sudden question.

"When the girl has gone through the door." His voice was slightly louder now, drowning out the air conditioning.

"The door goes."

"It goes?"

"Yeah, goes. Disappears. Vanishes."

"And then what?"

"I tidy up the flat."

"In what way do you tidy up?"

"Their clothes. I put their clothes into a cardboard box."

The doctor watched the man carefully, weighing up his words before he spoke. "Edward, where do the clothes come from?"

Edward frowned and jerked his head as if trying to fathom out a difficult problem. "From the girls."

"From the girls?"

He nodded.

"Do you have them take off their clothes when they get into your apartment?"

Edward shook his head.

"So they go into—they go through the door with their clothes still on?"

"Yes. With their clothes on."

He leaned forward slightly and lowered his voice.

"Then where do they come from, Edward?"

"Come from?"

"The clothes. If you send the girls into the room fully clothed and, as you've already told me, you don't go inside the room, then how do you get the clothes back on your side of the door?"

"They . . . they're left outside the door."

"So how does it work? The door opens and something drops the clothes out on your side?"

"N—no."

"Do you go through the door and get the clothes?"

"I told you, I don't—"

"Then how do the clothes appear?"

Edward crinkled up his mouth tightly and stared into some unfathomable distance just over the doctor's shoulder.

"Edward, I want to help you. Do you believe that? Do you believe I want to help you?"

He nodded. "Yes."

"Then we must be truthful with each other, yes?"

"Yes, truthful."

"Okay. Do you kill the girls, Edward?"

Edward shook his head.

"Do you have the girls take off their—"

"No."

"—take off their clothes and then—"

"No!"

"—and then you kill them and you cut them up—"

"No!" He turned around to the policeman who watched him impassively. "Tell him . . . tell him I don't kill them . . . I—"

"—and then cut them up and get rid of all the pieces. Except for the clothes."

Edward was snivelling. "I never killed anybody. Really. I take them in there because the things want me to."

The doctor sighed and leaned back on his chair. He waited for what must have been two full minutes and, when the man's sobbing had subsided, said, "And they just dump the clothes outside the door, right?"

Edward nodded and breathed in with a shudder.

"They leave the clothes and they go." He phrased it so that it wasn't a question. Edward did not respond. "Where? Where do they go? Where does the door go

to when it leaves your apartment?"

"I—I don't know. I've never seen it."

"Why not? Doesn't that strike you as strange? This door keeps appearing and disappearing in your house and you never see it either arrive or leave? Can you understand how difficult it is for me to believe you, Edward?"

"Yes. I can see that. But it's all true."

The doctor scribbled something on his paper.

"I'm always asleep," Edward said.

The doctor stopped writing and looked up.

"I'm always so tired when . . . when the girls have gone through the door." He sighed heavily. "And I go lie down, sleep. When I wake up the door has gone and the clothes are left behind. I gather up the clothes and put them in a cardboard box."

"Is that the box we found, Edward?"

"Yes."

"Inspector, what clothes were in Edward's box?"

The man turned around and stared at the policeman. Unperturbed, the policeman read from a notebook lying open on his lap. "Nine pairs of women's underpants—G-strings, panties and the like—four bras-sieres, four suspender belts, six pairs of tights, six individual stockings, two headscarves, one beret, five sweaters, five blouses or shirts, two waistcoats, one dress, four skirts, five pairs of trousers—three are blue denim, one bright yellow, plus a pair of ski-pants—four coats, two zip-up jackets, six handbags, three pairs of baseball boots, one pair of sandals and seven pairs of shoes, two flat-heeled and five high-." He closed the notebook and nodded to the wall by his side. "There. All present and correct," he added.

Doctor Malloy looked to the wall. There was the box, brown cardboard, its leaves standing at angles to the sides. Draped over the front leaf was a pair of blue, lace-edged panties.

The policeman stood up, tutted and walked across to the box. As he nudged the panties back into the box, the air conditioning gave out a low *thrum*.

"And how many women did you estimate that to represent, Inspector?"

"We worked it out to at least eleven, working on the footwear," he said as he regained his seat.

The man had turned around again and was now watching the doctor. Doctor Malloy felt tense.

"Edward, when we came into your flat there was no door anywhere."

"No."

"But you had the girl with you."

"She was a policewoman."

"Yes, I know she was a policewoman, but you didn't, did you? You didn't know that."

"No."

"And we were listening to you talk to the policewoman. That's why we broke into the flat. Let's hear



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that tape now." He nodded to the policeman. "Inspector?"

The policeman got to his feet again, sighing, and walked across the holding room to turn on the cassette player.

"We've forwarded it to the part where you both reach the flat," Doctor Malloy said.

There was hissing and crackling, the sound of the material of the policewoman's sweater rubbing on the microphone, and the distinct rap of footsteps.

"God . . . is it much further?"

"Nearly there."

"I should bloody hope so."

"Yeah, nearly there."

"Twenty, you said, yeah? Twenty quid?"

"Yeah, I'll give you twenty pounds."

"And no funny business, right?"

"No funny business."

The sound of a key being placed in a lock and turned. Elsewhere in the room, the pipes surged and a sharp but soft breath came from the cassette player.

"What was that?"

"What was what?" the policeman said.

Doctor Malloy pointed at the machine. "That! A . . . a sigh or something."

"I didn't hear anything," came the response.

Doctor Malloy reached over and pressed STOP.

The machine stopped.

They listened.

Nothing.

Just the air conditioning rubbing and pulling, twisting and turning itself, like stretched fabric.

"Wind it back."

The policeman walked across to the table and rewound the tape. To Doctor Malloy, the high-pitched gabble sounded like the noise that came from his spin-drier as it tumbled his shirts around and around and . . .

The policeman pressed PLAY.

". . . there."

"I should bloody hope so."

"Yeah, nearly there."

"Twenty, you said, yeah? Twenty quid?"

"Yeah, I'll give you twenty pounds."

"And no funny business, right?"

"No funny business."

The sound of the key again, entering the lock, turning. But this time there was nothing else. Doctor Malloy settled back and listened. When he looked down at his hands, he saw they were white, grasping his pencil so hard that, as he released his grip, a sharp pain washed through his finger ends.

"I don't do funny business," the woman's voice said.

"I don't want you to."

"What do you want then?"

"I'll tell you when we get inside."

"No, I want to know now."

A handle being turned.

"No, I'll tell you inside. Look, the door's open. It's safe for you to come in."

Footsteps.

When the man's voice starts again, it sounds further away. *"Look, nothing to be afraid of. Come in."*

Slow footsteps. They stop and start, stop and start.

The woman breathes out and her sweater rubs the mike. *"Look, I'm not sure about this."*

More footsteps. *"What aren't you sure about? Look, there's nothing here. Noth—It's gone!"*

"What's go—"

A door slams and cuts off the last word.

"—king door. It's gone."

Hurried footsteps move away. The man's voice is distant again. *"It's not here!"*

The woman's voice is faint and urgent now, the feigned roughness completely replaced by a soft and insistent fear. *"I think you'd better come up,"* she says amidst rustling noise.

"She's talking straight into the mike there," the policeman pointed out.

"Where was it?" Doctor Malloy asked. "The microphone?"

The policeman tapped his armpit. "There, nestled into her bra, just underneath her arm."

The doctor nodded.

"Now, please!" the policewoman's voice begs.

The man's voice comes back again, louder now. "It's not anywhere."

"What's not anywhere, love? Look, I told you no funny stuff, didn't I?"

Somewhere in the distance more footsteps sound, several sets, running, growing louder.

"Where is it?"

"Where's wh—"

"Where is it? Did you see it?"

Footsteps getting louder.

"Did I see wha—"

"Where is—"

The sound of thumping and breaking, splintering.

Footsteps now very loud. Several new voices. The sound of scuffling. Was it scuffling . . . that noise, that sibilant crumpling sound?

"I think you know the rest," the policeman said as he turned off the cassette player. He walked back across the room and sat down.

The man stared at his hands, rocking gently. "They knew," he said softly.

"What's that, Edward?" Doctor Malloy said. "They knew?"

"The things. They knew she was a policewoman. That's why they moved the door. They knew even before I did."

"So where is it now?"

"Wherever it goes when it's not in my flat."

"And where's that?"

"I don't know."

The air conditioning wheezed and fell silent.

♦ ♦

Frowning, Doctor Malloy watched two uniformed policemen accompany Edward Clegg down the corridor towards the cells.

Behind him, in the holding room, Inspector Andrews picked up a brassiere that had fallen out of the box. He must have knocked it out earlier. "Problem?" he asked.

"I don't know. Something . . . there's something about what he said."

"Like what?" The Inspector came out into the corridor pulling a packet of Gold Leaf cigarettes from his pocket and put one in his mouth.

"He didn't know his pick-up was a policewoman."

"So?"

"So why didn't he carry on the way he had done with all the others?"

Andrews blew out a plume of smoke and grunted.

"And where are the women?"

"He's got rid of them."

"Yes, but where? No signs of any struggles. No signs of any blood. And no sign of any bodies, despite the entire force combing the area for the past three weeks."

"So what are you saying?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"You're not telling me you believe him are you? That what he's telling us is true?"

"That's two questions. The answer to the first is yes, I do believe him. But, to the second, of course I don't believe his story is true. Only that *he* believes it is."

A shrill sound rang out and Inspector Andrews switched off the bleeper on his lapel. "Trouble," he said as he started to run along the corridor in the direction that Clegg had just gone. Doctor Malloy followed.

Just around the corner they reached the steps leading down to the cells. Two flights down, Clegg was sprawled on the floor, crying and fighting with his escort.

"I'll go down," Doctor Malloy said.

When he reached the men he said, "What's the problem, Edward?"

"I . . . I didn't tell you everything."

"Do you want to tell me now?"

Clegg sniffed and nodded.
 "What is it that you want to tell me?"
 "The things . . . when I wouldn't tell you how I knew they wanted the girls?"
 "Yes."
 "They whispered it to me."
 "Now?"
 "No, back at the flat."
 The two constables looked at each other and raised their eyes.
 "They whispered through the door?"
 "No. The first time. The first time I found the door, I went through it."
 "So the time you told us about was the first time that the door appeared?"
 "Yeah."
 "And you haven't been in there since?"
 "No way!"
 "Why?"
 "Because of what they whispered. And that's why you can't put me down there." He nodded his head in the direction of the dimly lit corridor of cells now just one flight below where they were standing. In one corner, the corner where the overhead light was at its dimmest, a pile of towels lay jumbled against the wall.
 "What did they say to you, Edward?"
 "They asked me to bring them women. Told me if I didn't they would come and get me. They said they'd seen me now and so they knew what I looked like. They said I had to give them women and that if I didn't then they'd come and get them themselves."
 Doctor Malloy waited.
 Clegg looked at the impassive faces of the constables.
 Doctor Malloy said, "And what else did they say?"
 "They . . . they told me that they'd take me as well."
 "Take you where, Edward?"
 "Wherever it is . . . behind the door. They said they'd get me."
 "They can't get you here, Edward."
 The man looked up at the doctor and shook his head. "Yes they can," he said.
 The constables led him away.

♦ ♦

"You think you should do this?"
 "Yes. There must be something there that could tell us what he's doing with the women." Doctor Malloy pulled on his overcoat and wrapped it tightly around himself.
 "But we've been through the place from top to bottom. There isn't anything."
 The doctor shrugged. "I think I should take a look."
 "You want me to have someone go with you?"

Inspector Andrews handed a pair of keys on a ring to the doctor.

"No, I'll go by myself." He dropped the keys into his pocket and walked towards the exit.

♦ ♦

Inspector Andrews was lighting another cigarette when the call came through. He listened to the voice on the other end of the line, frowning. He grunted an acknowledgement, replaced the receiver and stubbed out the cigarette.

When he got down to the cells the constables had cut the body down from the hot water pipes that threaded across the cell's ceiling.

"How?"

One of the constables held up a pink brassiere.

"Jesus Christ. You'd only just brought him down here," he said in exasperation.

The constable nodded and shuffled his weight from one foot to the other. "Nothing we could do, sir. You didn't ask us to stay with him. I asked him if he wanted a cup of tea or anything and he said yes. Few minutes later I brought the tea and there he was."

They all looked down at the body and then up at the pipes.

"Doesn't seem possible, does it?" the second constable said to nobody in particular.

The inspector shook his head.

The first constable was turning the brassiere over and over in his hands. "Funny," he said.

"Funny? I don't think it's fu—"

"No, not *him, this!*" and he held out the brassiere. "No make."

The inspector took it from him. "No make?"

"And no size details, either. There's nothing on it."

"Is it one of the items from the box?"

"I think so, yes. Where else would it have come from?"

"That's a very good question, Constable," he said. "More to the point, how the hell did it get down here?" He turned the brassiere in his hands and checked along the back straps. The constable was right. There were no manufacturer details on the garment at all. He looked up and said, "The other clothes still up stairs?"

The constables looked at each other. "We haven't moved anything," said the one who had made the discovery of the tagless brassiere.

Inspector Andrews stuffed the garment into his pocket and turned sharply around.

♦ ♦

Doctor Malloy turned up his coat collar against the cold wind and ran from his car to Edward's apart-

ment building. He went through the main doors, up the stairs two at a time and then stood outside Edward's door. The key felt strange in his hand. He inserted it into the lock, turned and pushed the door.

Walking inside, he was aware of something different.

The place was completely black. No light anywhere.

He turned to the wall at his side and flicked the light switch. As the room burst into brightness, he half-expected to see the door waiting for him. But the room was empty.

Doctor Malloy kicked the door closed behind him and put the key back in his pocket. The answer was here, he was sure.

Something was here, whatever it was. He could feel it.

He walked across the room to the kitchen and pushed open the door. Empty.

He felt his heart beating.

Get out, a tiny voice said deep in his brain. He ignored it and walked back across the room, stamping his feet on the floor and listening for any change in the sound.

Suddenly a telephone started ringing.

He looked around for the telephone, trying to pin-point the sound, but couldn't see one. Then he realized it was coming from the room opposite the kitchen. The bedroom. He walked across and pushed open the door.

Even in the small amount of light thrown in from the main room, he could see that the place was a mess. There were clothes everywhere.

The ringing was louder now and he saw the telephone. It was next to a lamp sitting on a small cabinet beside a bed which was strewn with shirts and trousers, socks and ties. He shook his head and flicked the light switch on the wall beside him. It didn't work.

He walked across the bedroom and lifted the receiver. He placed it by his ear but didn't speak.

The familiar voice of Inspector Andrews said, "Malloy?"

"Yes?" He stood with his back to the door and stared at the wall watching the line of light cast by the door shimmer on the wallpaper.

"Listen." The Inspector sighed. "Our man's topped himself."

"What? How?"

"Hanged himself with a bra."

"Oh, wonderful!" He pushed his hand into his trouser pocket and flicked his fingers against the key.

"But get this. None of the clothing has any manufacturers' labels."

"Huh?"

"Not one. None of the underclothes, none of the blouses or the jeans, not even any of the shoes."

Doctor Malloy watched the line on the wallpaper, the thin boundary between light and darkness, slowly move to his right. The door was closing.

He reached out and flicked the switch on the bedside lamp. The close light made him feel better. Safer, somehow.

"Malloy?"

"I'm still here." He pushed a pile of clothes onto the floor and sat on the cleared edge of the bed. "I'll tell you this . . . your boys ought to clean up after they check a place."

"Clean up? How do you mean?"

"Edward's bedroom. It's a mess. Clothes everywhere. Anyway—"

"Clothes everywhere? I'm not with you. The place was neat as a new pin when we left. And there weren't any clothes."

The door finally drifted shut with a soft click.

Doctor Malloy frowned. "No clothes? None at all?" He reached down and picked up a shirt. It felt faintly warm to the touch. He fumbled one-handed until he exposed the back of the collar. There was no label.

He turned his head to look at the door and felt something slip inside his chest. There were two doors.

One of them was the door that Doctor Malloy had come through when he entered the bedroom: the other was completely unattached to anything, standing a few inches away from the wall. It was purple and had the number 17 boldly emblazoned between two inlaid panels.

"It's here," he said into the receiver. But even as the words left his mouth he knew that the Inspector wouldn't respond. He leaned forward and looked under the table. The telephone wire had been torn apart. Several pieces of clothing were gathered around the two pieces of wire, and others—Malloy saw a striped regimental-style tie and a pair of green boxer shorts slide over the lamp socket—were slowly making their way towards his feet.

In front of the purple door, a pile of sheets was gathering—they were almost as high as the door handle.

He stood up and dropped the receiver.

There was a sharp tearing sound and the light went out.

Then, in the blackness, there was only the soft click of a door opening—though no new light was introduced into the room—and a flurry of insistent, excited rustling.

— CD

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CHARLES L.
GRANT

RAMBLINGS FROM THE DARK #20

On Dan Ackroyd, *The Pet, Raven*, Harlan Ellison, and *Passion Without Romance*:

A couple of weeks ago I watched Tom Snyder's show on CNBC. I don't much like Mr. Snyder's television persona, and every time I see him I can't help seeing, and hearing, Dan Ackroyd doing his devastating *Saturday Night Live* impersonation. Kind of takes the oomph out of the man's performance, I can tell you.

But I watched that night because Harlan Ellison was his guest.

At the same time I also had been thinking about a question someone asked me (again) about my stories: which is my favorite? and which do I think is my best?

Believe it or not, the two events are connected.

Be patient here while I ramble a bit. Walking around helps me think.

First, let's get a couple of things clear right from the start—I've known Harlan for nearly 25 years now, our first contact being a letter from him to me about something I had said in *F&SF* about him, and my amazingly, incredibly, embarrassingly sappy reply, to which he quite rightly did not respond.

Since then (1968, in fact), we've seen each other off and on, phoned, written, and I even married his date from the Fort Worth World Fantasy Convention (heh,

heh, heh; if you can't beat him with words, steal his women). Since then, as well, I've heard the umpteenth zillion "Harlan" stories—the horror ones, the awed ones, the who the hell does he think he is ones, the I hate him/love him ones, and a few that were even moderate in tone.

So I watched him on Tom Snyder and I began to wonder, as I do when I don't have anything better to do, like make a living, what in god's name is it about the man that polarizes so many people? He certainly speaks his mind, he does on occasion shoot from the hip, he embraces writers and artists and causes by the dozen, he castigates and chides and assaults writers and artists and causes by the dozen—but so what? I can think of any number of people who do the same, so why aren't they reacted to with the same passionate love or hatred?

I think, at long last, and as if you care, I have a clue.

Maybe it was my reaching 50 last year, and watching Harlan (who is older by several years, by the way; just thought I'd let you know) endure some unpleasant physical problems, the results of which will be with him for the rest of his life. I really don't like it when people near my age have problems. It's too damn close to home.

Or maybe it was when he called me out of the blue (as al-

ways) a while back to tell me something he'd said about me in an interview, and he didn't want me to be mad; he was also sure the interviewer would contact me in hopes of getting a reaction, and, by extension, generating yet another pointless and stupid controversy. I was indeed contacted. I didn't reply. Because I wasn't offended. What Harlan said was perfectly true (he called me a "control freak"). I thought then, and do now—big deal. I've got bills to pay. Next question. And while you're at it, get a life.

Or maybe it had something to do with the books I've been reading lately, especially in our field.

The thing is, no matter what the man talks about, and no matter where he talks about it, he is, by and large and mostly large, *passionate* about it. *Emotional* about it. Half measures need not apply where he is concerned. And for this he's vilified, crucified, adored, and all that jazz. None of which he deserves.

Here's another thing, something most people tend to forget because they're reacting to the man, not the writer: when Harlan is even close to the top of his form, there ain't nobody, but nobody, can come close to him, in either the way his stories are written or the impact they have.

I hasten to add here, as a paralogical aside, that this is in-

tended to be neither a eulogy nor a paean. The man's not dead, and he sure ain't perfect. If you think he is, you're a fool; yet if you think he's the Devil or something equally nasty and malicious, you're a bigger fool.

He is what he is: a writer of passion.

And that's the answer to the question put to me on more than one occasion.

My best work, I think, is the story that's most infused with some telling emotion. *The Pet, Raven*, "Hear Me Now, My Sweet Abbey Rose"—God knows they're flawed as hell, but they've reached some readers in ways I could never dream of because of their emotional impact, and, more importantly, the emotional drive behind and in and throughout each of them. Not that the other stories don't have emotion; but somehow, for some reason I cannot fathom, these particular ones generated particular emotions in me while in the writing, which were then, somehow, transplanted into the characters' lives.

The same is true of all of us. When the characters become people, when their lives matter and what they do therefore matters, the story lives. I mean, *lives*. In this respect, it doesn't make a bit of difference how old or new the idea behind the plot is—if the emotions are there, honestly there, the story can't be beat.

Which is why so much of what I've been reading lately has been so ultimately disappointing. I'll grin at a clever idea, and sigh when the book is done; I'll groan at the rehash of an old idea, and grin when the book is done.

For example, vampires are still hot right now, and so far I can count on the fingers of one hand how many of those dozens of books I've read made me grin. Why? Because the writer was so taken by the *idea*—councils of vampires, vampires searching for the

elixir of life (for crying out loud), vampires who don't want to be vampires, vampires who want to be vampires but not the kind of vampires they are—that the story reads like a blueprint. There's no foundation. There's no emotional underpinning.

There's no life.

There's no passion.

It is, of course, true that you can't imbue everything you write with the same emotional intensity. You'd probably kill yourself in a week. It's also true, however, that you can damn well work at it, give it your best shot; and if you fail in making the attempt, that's a hell of a lot better than not making the attempt at all. Which is what these writers aren't doing—they're not trying.

The story is important, right?

Sure it is. But, for the umpteenth time, it's the characters that make the story live and breathe and walk around in the reader's mind.

Dan Ackroyd's devastating impersonations of Tom Snyder, Julia Child, and Jimmy Carter worked not because the voices were right, but everything else was—the gestures, the mannerisms, the speech patterns, the situations, etc. Yet, of course, they weren't the real thing.

And neither are stories without the emotion—they're impersonations. Clever, perhaps, and perhaps even really well done. But they don't live.

A long, long time ago, I went to a party at an agent's house in New York. As soon as I walked in the door, I was met by a young man (hell, we were all young then) who said, perfectly seriously, and I swear to you this is true, "Hi, I'm X X, and I'm the next Harlan Ellison."

Well, he wasn't then, and he isn't now, but buy me a drink sometime and I'll tell you his name.

He didn't even have the moves right.

The party was lousy, too.

This, of course, can be taken as one of those Old Fart things I talked about a few columns ago—we get to complain about how the younger generation is screwing things up (and getting more money than we ever did for doing it) while the rest of us toil in the vineyards without adequate compensation or recognition, and we don't even get to eat the grapes.

Not this time. The money, while I sure could use it, isn't important here. What is important is the deliberate substitution of stylistic tricks and bogus melodramatic situations for real emotion and passion. Some of it, without question, is part of the learning process. We all go through it. Some of it, on the other hand, is either willful ignorance, or absolute disdain for the readers who are, consciously or not, looking for something just a little more in their reading.

Somebody says, well, hell, you Old Fart, all I want to do is tell a good story.

Wonderful. That is, or should be, the goal of everyone who puts pen to paper, fingers to keyboard/typewriter, images to the screen.

Unfortunately, too many stop at "good". That's a crime; too often that means "mediocre". It's also damn lazy. It's hard to try to do better than "good." It's very hard indeed. And that's no excuse for not giving it your best shot, every time out, with every word, every scene, every character.

Harlan's passion makes people uncomfortable; stories filled with passion make people feel not always comfortable, but they feel *something*, and while it isn't always nice, it isn't always bad, either.

When the Tom Snyder show was over, I kind of shook my head and said something like, "My god, that's Harlan all right."

It sure wasn't Dan Ackroyd.

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ED
GORMAN

GORMANIA

As we all know, writers love to bitch, and one of the things they bitch about most is the publicity departments of publishing houses.

God knows, I could fill this and several more columns with nothing but publicity department horror stories.

I have a friend who got an Elmore Leonard quote for his forthcoming book which the publicity person decided not to use because "(she) wasn't exactly sure who Elmore Leonard (is)." Apparently, Elmore Leonard is not taught at Smith or Vassar.

Or the prominent mystery writer whose publisher invariably supplies her with a young woman who always confuses the author with somebody else on the publisher's list. ("Oh, *now* I know who you are!")

Or the publicity person who once included a decidedly mixed review in a promotional piece. "Gee, do you really think that 'sleaze' is a put-down?"

Or, from my own dossier of atrocities, the eager young man who got me twenty radio interviews in towns that make Cedar Rapids look like Paris and I mean France not Illinois. My favorite of all the interviewers was the guy who said (I am placing my right

hand on a Bible as I type with my left), "I guess the reason I never heard of you before Ed is you must use one of them there, uh, aliases."

"I think you mean pen-names."

"Oh, yeah, right, pen-names." He did say them there. He did say aliases. Honest. It was Twilight Zone-time.

Fame does not necessarily make all this any better. A justifiably famous friend of mine phoned the other day to read the publicity sheet accompanying his new novel and it was pretty grim. Not only did the publicity writer get the storyline wrong, he also interpreted various scenes improperly, thinking that they implied one thing when they clearly implied another. Subtext is the word I want here, I think. The guy got the subtext completely wrong. And this is for a book that will be one of the year's biggest sellers. If the publisher doesn't spend any time or care on my famous friend, then what kind of treatment can the rest of us expect?

That's the first part of this column, the part in which I portray publicity people as lazy, shallow, ill-educated and sometimes even arrogant.

The second part of this col-

umn, however, is something of a defense of these same people and why I think we often times don't have any real appreciation of how difficult their jobs are.

Please make no mistake. I am not defending stupidity (misspelling the author's name), laziness (forgetting to include blurbs on a book) or mendacity (being so abrupt with authors that they're afraid to ask follow-up questions).

But promoting novels is a bitch, folks, it really is. And believe it or not, I actually know half a dozen hardworking, intelligent and creative publicity people who sincerely try to better the lot of each book they're assigned.

A lot of non-fiction pretty much promotes itself. A starlet writes a book about a couple of new erogenous zones she recently discovered on her body? An investment counselor serving time in a minimum-security prison figures out how even a dunce like you can make money in the stock market? Pat Robertson's story of being violated by bisexual aliens?

These are the types of books Larry King, Today, 20/20 and all your local stations are eager to promote. All the publicity person has to do is phone or FAX the appropriate human, and his work is

pretty much done.

Novels, however, are just about unprofitable any time, any where.

Why? Well, relative to our population, a small percentage of the population reads novels. And novels, no matter how exciting or even salacious they may be, rarely sound as exciting as "non-fiction," or what passes for non-fiction these days (do you *really* believe that J. Edgar Hoover was a cross-dresser? My God!) And—here is the vilest truth of all—most novelists make lousy guests. True, there are a few writers who are just as entertaining as their books (Dean Koontz and Max Allan Collins come to mind), but most of us are even duller than Veg-O-Matic info-commercials, myself included, sweaty, beady-eyed little folk too eager to sonorously proclaim our own greatness. ("You know, Maury, being we're pals and

all, I've got to admit that my novels should sell much better than they do because, well, face it, I'm a great guy and I deserve it and I hope that every professional wrestling fan watching this show runs out and buys my latest because, well, it's like I say, I'm just a great guy and I haven't been able to buy medicine for my infant son for more than six months and he's turning into a mutant or something!")

I think we have to acknowledge that novel promotion is tough work and cut our publicity people a little slack. They're overworked (though with the mid-list being slashed, they should have some more time on their hands) and they're dealing with program directors who are indifferent if not downright hostile to novelists.

This said, I should tell you about Sisters in Crime, a fine organization for mystery writers of

any gender that has evolved, over the past five or six years, an entire program for writers promoting themselves.

Many of its members have flourished because of this detailed, sensible, affordable self-promotional program. Most of the bookstore owners I know tell me that it really works.

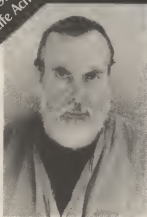
In the end, I think the Sisters have it about right. Nobody else is going to work as hard as you at promoting yourself.

If you're interested in learning more, write Beth Wasson, Exec. Secretary, P.O. Box 442124, Lawrence, KS 66044-8933.

These inspired women long ago quit bitching about their fate and did something constructive about it.

There may be a lesson for us in there somewhere.

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MR. GOD

THOMAS TESSIER

THOMAS TESSIER was born in Connecticut, where he currently lives. A well-respected short story writer, he is also the author of several novels of horror and suspense, including *The Nightwalker*, *Phantom*, *Rapture*, and his most recent book, *Secret Strangers*.

Rex nearly threw up when he finally saw the damn things. He thought about changing his mind—but the upside was too good to pass on. Joey brought in a cardboard banana carton, set it down on the kitchen table and removed the lid. They were in a plastic bag packed with ice and sawdust: a dozen monkey heads. There was a lot of blood, still wet, and stringy bits of mangled flesh that trailed away from the coarse black hair.

"A dozen?" Rex asked.

"Yeah, a baker's dozen," Joey replied with a brief laugh.

"How much did he settle for?"

"Three hundred."

"You're sure they're not rotten?"

"He did it while I waited."

"Okay. Good." Then, "What kind are they?"

"He didn't say."

"Probably doesn't matter."

"Nah. Monkeys are monkeys."

Rex went to the refrigerator and took out a pitcher of high-protein milkshake that he had prepared earlier. Then he removed one of the monkey heads from the bag. It was damp, and the short hair had a stiff, wiry feel. He put it down on the butcher board and stared at it for a few seconds.

"You sure?" Joey asked.

"Sure I'm sure."

"Okay."

Joey turned away to get a beer from the fridge. Rex picked up the hammer and tapped the monkey head a couple of times to get an idea of how hard it was. Then he gave it a firm blow, and the skull cracked

audibly.

"Perfect," Rex said.

"You got a nice touch, boss."

Rex gently pried the pieces of bone apart. He used a fork to separate the layers of brain tissue that looked like grey mud with a blush on it.

"Did he tell you what the hyper-whaddaya . . ."

"Hypothalamus," Joey supplied.

"Right."

"He told me it looks kinda like a pea, only a little fatter. And lumpy. It's lumpy."

"Yeah, here it is."

"At the bottom of the brain?" Joey asked, still reluctant to look directly at what Rex was doing.

"Yeah, sort of."

"That's it."

"Small, but packed with goodies." The only way to do it was quickly, so Rex put the fork in his mouth and then pulled it out. The gland sat on his tongue, cool and slimy. Rex became aware of an unpleasant odor rising through his nasal passages from within. He took a large gulp of milkshake, and then swallowed.

"No problem," Rex said, reaching into the plastic bag. "One down, twelve to go."

♦ ♦

The trouble is, Rex thought as he drove down the Hutchinson River Parkway, I take so much goddamn stuff that it's impossible to tell what helps and what doesn't. D-ball, Anadrol, Hexalone, Bolasterone, Dehydralone, Triacana, Human Growth Hormone . . . not to forget the monkey glands (but only that once). And something was working, because Rex was finally beginning to put on that crucial extra muscle that would lift him to the highest level.

Rex had been to all the main events but one. The regionals, Mr. America, Mr. Galaxy, the Night of Champions, Mr. Universe, but always as a spectator,

never a participant. He was so well-built and handsome that he had acquired a minor cult following as the next can't-miss star on the bodybuilding scene. People told Rex that he was crazy not to start entering the major events, but he had his own schedule.

He had never been to Mr. God, the most prestigious event in the world. He had stayed away on purpose. He wanted to be sure he was absolutely ready. Rex intended to make his debut at the next Mr. God—and to win it. That would be an amazing coup—his first major event, his first first, and the best event there is. All of the other prizes would inevitably fall to him after that. Had anybody ever launched a new reign in such a dramatic fashion? Never. It would be one for the record books.

He took a familiar exit and drove into the Bronx. As usual, Dr. Jack's office was empty. The receptionist, Carmella, smiled warmly as she always did. She was reading a magazine, trying to stay awake until the phone rang or something happened. Carmella wanted Rex, but he didn't want her. Too skinny, small tits. And Rex had a serious problem.

"Hello, Rex," Dr. Jack said without rising. He sat behind a battered wooden desk that was cluttered with pill bottles, sample drugs and stacks of trade literature. "Looking good."

"Yeah, but I'm not feeling good."

"What's the problem?"

"My nuts are disappearing."

"Oh," Dr. Jack said with little concern.

"They used to be as big as peaches, Doc, but now they look like a couple of peanuts. You want to see?"

"No, I'll take your word for it," Dr. Jack said with a calm smile. "It's a common side effect."

"And I don't have any sex desire left," Rex continued. "Not any, none, zero. No boners, nothing."

"Right."

"Well, can you do something for me?"

"It'll come back, and your testicles will regain their size, when you stop taking all the steroids."

Rex shook his head. "No can do, Doc."

"I didn't think so." Dr. Jack shifted in his chair. "Well, I can give you some Halotestin. That should boost your sex drive a little. Maybe some Clomid too. Women use it to increase their fertility, but in men it has the effect of increasing the body's testosterone output. I've found that the two work well together. They'll get the old carnal juices flowing again."

"Great," Rex said.

"But you'll have to keep on taking them, as long as you're still on the other stuff. Otherwise, it soon wears off."

"What doesn't?" Rex asked with a bitter laugh. "I have to keep on taking *everything*. By the way, I need some more Hex and Bola. You know, I can feel that stuff working the minute I take them. It's like an



electric charge in my muscles."

"Be careful with that shit. It's toxic."

"It's the only way," Rex said.

"Do you know Louie Ginacora?"

"Louie Gee? Sure," Rex replied. "Met him once or twice, at events in Manhattan. Why?"

"He died Saturday night."

"You're kidding. What the hell happened?"

"He just won Mr. Northwest States, and they had to carry him off the stage—once the curtain came down, of course. And less than an hour later he was dead. Dehydration."

"Diuretics," Rex said.

"You got it. He had a temp of a hundred and ten. He cooked himself to death."

Rex shrugged. "Diuretics are for piss artists."

Dr. Jack smiled obligingly. It was an old gym joke.

"What are you aiming for, Rex?"

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"Come on."

"Twenty-inch arms and calves, thirty-inch thighs, sixty-inch chest. Perfect symmetry."

"Jesus."

"Yeah," Rex smiled. "Mr. God."

◆ ◆

"Connie?"

"Yes. Rex, is that you?"

"Yeah. Is your husband home?"

"Of course not, he's at the office."

"I'll be right over."

"It's been more than a month since I heard from you," Connie said in mild protest. "Rex? Rex?"

He got to Greenwich in less than fifteen minutes, and pulled into the secluded driveway that led to Connie's house. She tried to look both annoyed and uninterested.

"I was sick," he said by way of explanation.

"You still could have called."

"I think I did, once."

She had just closed the front door. They were in an elegant foyer. Rex grabbed her, lifting her white tennis skirt. She had a suitably discreet air of lingering sweat.

"Rex, not here. At least let's—"

"This can't wait, babe."

"Oh my God, it's like a crowbar. You poor man."

She moved quickly, undoing his pants. "Here, lie down and let me take care of you. Were you thinking of me all the way over here?"

"I sure am."

◆ ◆

"You know, you taste different."

"Do tell," Rex said lazily.

"No, really. I mean it."

"I'm on a better diet now."

"You know something else?"

"What?"

"You're ready again."

Rex lifted his head and looked down across his belly. "I'll be damned. Doc was right."

"What was it—five minutes ago?" Connie said in amazement. "If that. Wow, I'm flattered. And this time I'm going to enjoy it, oh so slowly."

She removed her panties, licked her fingers and rubbed them between her legs—did that a couple of times until she was good and moist. Then she squatted over him and gently lowered herself until she could steer him inside.

"God, you're even bigger and harder than the last time."

"Yeah," Rex murmured happily. A few moments later she came to a sudden stop, and he opened his eyes. "What's the matter?"

"Rex, you're bleeding. From the nose."

He wiped his hand across his face and saw a bright red smear of blood. Then he could feel it trickling over his lips.

"I get nosebleeds," he said. "It's no big deal."

"Do you want me to get an ice-pack or—"

"It can wait." He held his head in a position so that the blood continued to drop into his mouth. There had to be protein in human blood, and Rex hated to lose any. But sometimes he just had to let it go: "Don't stop," he gasped.

"Okay," Connie said gratefully. "Ooooh-kaaay-baaabyl"

◆ ◆

"Seven sets today," Rex said proudly as he dug into the huge platter of spaghetti and meatballs. "Seven sets and eight meals. Whaddaya think of that?"

"Don't overdo that weightlifting," Joey said.

"Yeah, I know. Man, I love your mother's sauce."

"One more month. Don't peak too soon."

"I know, I know." Rex gulped down a mouthful of shake. "Oh man, you know how many times I got laid today? Ten."

"Fuckin' hell."

"Too much," Rex said. "It doesn't take long, but it takes a little organizing, you know? I can't afford the time, but now I just see a woman and boing, I'm ready."

"Poor bastard."

Rex laughed. "That shit Dr. Jack gave me sure does the job, but I think I'll ease it down a notch. I don't even have to give it a thought, no fantasies, nothing like that. Just, boing, bang, and on to the next one."

"I kinda like the fantasy part," Joey admitted.

"Yeah? Like what?"

"It's always the same. I'm in the confessional at St. Joe's and Patty Fitzsimmons is sitting on my bone. She's wearing that plaid skirt and knee socks. Her white blouse is off, and—"

"Hey, come on, I gotta finish this meal."

"Sorry. That reminds me. I got a call from Dickie-boy this afternoon. Can you do Sunday?"

"You bet," Rex said quickly. "I was thinking about him. My cash is getting low, so this is perfect."

Dickie-boy was one of several contacts Joey had made in the New York gay world when Rex decided to work fulltime on his body. Rex did parties. Like an exotic dancer at a bachelor stag. Sort of an I-am-Adonis-and-you-may-worship-my-body act. The gay boys were wealthy, and paid very well. It was a job, nothing more—virtually his only regular source of income. Rex didn't have to touch them and there was no real sex, but he did let them stroke and caress him, and when the payoff was rich enough he'd let them suck or jack him off. Encores were extra.

"Great," Rex said, pushing the empty platter away.

"Anything else?" Joey asked.

"No, call it a night. See you tomorrow?"

"Yeah, I'll be here about five. Okay?"

Joey was a great help, a devoted friend. He had a day job, delivering parts for an auto supply company in Queens, and he put in countless hours a month helping Rex with any odd errand that needed doing. They'd been friends since grade school. Rex meant to see that Joey got a hefty share of the riches that would soon come flooding in after Mr. God.

"Five's fine," Rex said. "I'll be here."

"I'll just take care of these dishes."

"Thanks, Joey."

Rex stood up and took a step away from the table. He felt a wave of sudden dizziness surge through his head. Sweat seemed to erupt on his face. He grabbed at the back of the chair to steady himself, but knocked it over.

"Jesus, boss." Joey caught Rex as he started to tilt, and managed to get him to the sofa. "Lie down here, boss. You got a helluva nosebleed, it's really pumping out."

Rex tried to move, but couldn't. He was aware of something cold and wet being pressed against his face. He was swallowing a lot of liquid, reflexive gulps. It was hard to breathe. Then he lost track of everything.

♦ ♦

"What the hell is this?" A roar.

"Pardon?"

"Is this list accurate?" the ER intern demanded.

"What list?" Rex asked in a subdued tone.

"The nurse asked you what medicines you're taking, and you rattled off—this?" He waved a sheet of paper angrily.

"Yes, sir."

"All these steroids and androgens? Clomid, for God's sake? Halotestin?"

"I might've forgot one or two."

The intern gaped at him, then sought refuge in the piece of paper again. "I don't even know what some of this shit is. What the hell is Parabolin?"

Rex smiled weakly. "Para, yeah. You take a sip of that and your lips feel like sparklers for a couple of hours. You feel it in your muscles like you're wired to an outlet."

"Oh, really? Well, let me tell you something, Hercules, and you listen good. The next time you start spouting blood, you can save us all a lot of time and trouble by driving straight around to the back of the hospital. That's where the morgue is."

Rex didn't get a chance to formulate a reply. The outraged young intern stomped out of the cubicle and disappeared. Touchy son of a bitch, Rex thought. That's what honesty gets you.

♦ ♦

"You're all alone, Doc?" Rex said as he hobbled through the doorway into Dr. Jack's private office.

"Hello, Rex. Carmella's at the post office. Come in, come in. You're looking a bit delicate."

"I am." Rex eased himself into a chair.

"What's the problem?" Dr. Jack asked in a tone of voice that made it clear he knew perfectly well what the problem was. "Did the Halotestin and Clomid help?"

"Oh, Jeez, yeah. That stuff works great," Rex said. "I've been hopping around three counties like a rabbit on fire."

"Ah, good." Dr. Jack smiled.

"But I've been having these damn nosebleeds, and every one of them is a little worse than the last time."

"Right."

"One minute I'm fine, then suddenly blood's flying right out of my face. I mean, I'm really hosing the stuff, Doc."

"You have to cut back," Dr. Jack said. "That's the only way you'll get the nosebleeds to stop."

"Any one thing in particular?" Rex asked hopefully.

"The whole menu, I should think. How can anybody know what this or that drug is doing to you, when you take so many, and in such reckless combinations?"

"Two and a half weeks, Doc," Rex said pleadingly.

"Two and a half weeks to Mr. God."

"You'll probably be fine till then, but as soon as



it's over you have to give your body a rest."

"Sure, sure," Rex agreed with obvious relief. He tapped his chest. "Fifty-nine and a quarter, Doc."

"Very good. You aren't experiencing any other problems?"

"Just a little dizziness—that comes with the nose-bleeds. And I woke up in the middle of the night a couple of times in the last week, with these shooting pains in my sides. Like real bad cramps, you know? I figure that's just from the way I eat—I'm putting away eight meals a day, plus snacks."

"Stand up, Rex, and lift your shirt." Dr. Jack came around the desk and examined Rex's abdomen, gently palpating and probing the flesh. Then he pressed one spot, and Rex sank to his knees with a gasp of pain. "Mm-hmmn."

"Jeez, Doc," Rex muttered. "What'd you do?"

"That where you've been feeling the—cramps?"

"Yeah, in and around there."

"Sit down." Dr. Jack returned behind the desk and took his own seat again. "You've probably got some cysts growing in your liver. It's a common occurrence among people who take steroids on a regular basis."

"Cysts? Is that bad?"

"They'll stop growing if you stop—"

"And if I don't?" Rex cut in.

"They'll keep growing, destroying your liver, and eventually they'll explode and kill you."

"Can you operate?" Rex hated the thought of a scar on his body. "Can you just, like, cut 'em out?"

Dr. Jack laughed. "No. But you can relax for now, because they've probably just started. You'd be in a lot more pain all the time if they were advanced. And as for your liver, a person can get by all right as long as there's about twenty percent of it still functioning."

"Oh, good. I can taper off later."

"Sure," Dr. Jack said agreeably.

"Doc, I need something to juice me up for the extra sets of exercises I have to do. I get tired and lazy, and I can't afford that now, when I'm less than three weeks from Mr. God."

Dr. Jack nodded. "I can give you some Ritalin. Just don't take too much of it or you'll find yourself ripping doors off of their hinges."

"Gotcha."

♦ ♦

Rex closed the door behind him as he stepped back into the reception room. Carmella had returned from the post office. She was standing by her desk with her skirt up in her hands, so that the electric fan cooled her legs and crotch. She glanced back at Rex, then turned and dropped her skirt—but not before he could

get a look at her thighs. Not as thin as he had thought. Nicely curved, in fact.

"Hi, Rex."

"Hi."

"This heat's something, isn't it?"

"Yeah."

"I keep asking him to get an air-conditioner for this room, and he keeps saying that he will, but he never does."

She sat back against the edge of the desk, legs apart. She held the front of her blouse and fluttered it back and forth in a fanning motion. He could see the curve of a breast.

"Rex, you're going to be Mr. God. I know it."

"Thanks."

Rex shuffled toward the door, but hesitated when he came to Carmella. He was hunched over slightly, moving awkwardly.

"Are you all right?" she asked with concern.

"Oh yeah, it's just a little . . . embarrassing."

"What?" A hand on his arm.

"You're so pretty today, and" He glanced down.

"Rex . . ." She saw the enormous bulge in his pants. "Come in here with me." She steered him into the adjacent supply room and locked the door. She smiled. "Show me your chest?" Rex pulled his T-shirt over his head. Carmella's eyes widened, and she ran her hand adoringly over the layered muscles. "Fabulous. And can I see your legs?" Rex kicked his shoes off and carefully tugged his slacks and underpants down, stepping out of them. He struck his best pose, proudly rippling his muscles in a dazzling cascade of sweat-slicked flesh. Like everyone who saw him naked, she was awed not just by his body, but also by its complete lack of hair. Hair belonged on the head, nowhere else. He turned and presented his backside to her, continuing to flex in sequence. She went down, taking his lower body in her arms, stroking him, kissing him, pressing her face to his skin everywhere.

He stood there, and let her.

It's always like this, he thought dreamily. They want to be all over you, they'd be in your skin if they could. To touch you and touch you and never stop touching—it was like adoration, a surrender to worship. Because you are more physical, more real, more alive—and more than merely human, a higher form. No, not a god—but godlike, a nearly perfect incarnation. This is what they wanted to touch, to feel, to hold to themselves, to take in their bodies and mouths—gay boys and ordinary women alike—a touch of the glorious, the purely physical. Everything that they have lost and will never find again.

♦ ♦

"How can I go onstage like this?"

"No problem," Joey said comfortingly. "You're going to have to smile, right? So your mouth is open. If you have to swallow, do it as part of another movement, so it doesn't look like you're gulping."

"Yeah, but what if I start dripping?"

"Suck it down, boss. Suck it down."

Rex was lying on the table. Joey used tweezers to withdraw a wad of bloody cotton. He dropped it in a plastic bowl and went for the next one. It was a workable idea, the only one Dr. Jack had been able to suggest.

Joey had bought a white cotton men's shirt, and washed it in warm water with no soap or detergent. Then he cut it into thin strips a few inches long, rolled them up while they were still damp, and chilled them in the refrigerator for a couple of hours. When they were ready, cold but not yet stiff, he used a Japanese chopstick to gently push them up Rex's nostrils, packing them in tightly. Twice a day, and it worked.

"But what if some of it oozes through and drips down my face and chest?" Rex persisted anxiously.

"Well, then you'd better do a quick twirl and wipe it off," Joey suggested with a laugh. "Don't worry, I'll put a fresh load in ten minutes before you go on. You'll be fine."

"I'll be fine," Rex echoed lamely. "Where's Carmella?"

"Making coffee, and a shake for you."

"I need her."

"Coming up." Joey packed in the last wad of cotton.

Like Joey, Carmella was devoted to Rex. She'd given up her job with Dr. Jack to be with Rex all the time. He needed her six to ten times a day, and it was much more convenient this way. It meant that Connie, and several other women in the area, no longer heard from Rex. But that was their hard luck.

Joey disappeared. Carmella appeared. It took less than two minutes, and Rex felt mildly relaxed.

"You know, your cum is kind of green now."

"Yeah, sure."

"No, really. It's greener than it was."

"It's just the light."

"I don't think so It tastes different, too."

♦ ♦

"You sure?" Joey asked.

"Last round," Rex said, smiling. "Twenty-four hours. This shit'll be kicking in real good by then."

"You're sure."

"Sure I'm sure."

"Okay."

Rex took the first of a long line of pills, popped it in his mouth and washed it down with spring water.

Alongside the pills were several plastic thimbles containing various liquids. He was not taking a chance. It was all there, everything except monkey brains. He had to laugh. He had done a few silly things on the way. Like monkey brains. Or trying to inject Beladron straight into his thyroid. The things you do, the money you pay. But all of that was behind him now. Next stage, Mr. God.

♦ ♦

The official measurements were taken. Rex was dizzy, and could hardly stand or see. Black spots detonated silently across his vision, whether his eyes were open or shut. It took all his concentration to stay on his feet. It seemed as if he had to force himself to breathe. But he was aware of the ooohs, and then the loud cheers and cries of approval. He hit every one of his targets. "You did it, boss," Joey shouted enthusiastically as he helped Rex stagger off the stage.

Perfect symmetry.

♦ ♦

Rex was lying on a table in the dressing room. His head was buried in ice packs, only his mouth open to the air. The hideous nosebleeds and headaches were driving him crazy. Joey had just packed his nose with cold cotton, and stepped out of the room to let Carmella finish the prep. Rex tried to relax, concentrating on the exquisite movements of Carmella's hands as she jerked him off. He came quickly, but then Rex felt too sleepy, too subdued, and he was afraid that would come across onstage. He sat up and looked around anxiously.

"I want Ritalin, Para and Prima."

Carmella rooted through the tote bag and came up with them. She never questioned him, like Joey did, and he appreciated that. He popped the Ritalin, then sipped the Para and Prima. His mouth flared as if it were on fire, his lips jangled with electricity. Carmella finished taping his genitals. She slipped his shorts on and tugged them in place.

A knock on the door: "Five minutes."

"Come on," Rex muttered, waiting for the Ritalin to kick in. "Come on, damnit"

Another knock. Rex stood up. The muscles in his arms and legs were sizzling, and his chest was stitched with pinpricks of fiery light. In the tunnel, he stopped and flexed once, and his body felt like a symphony. Rex smiled and tottered on. He was aware of Joey nearby, a hand on his arm, and Carmella, a hand on his back. The silk robe fluttered in the air as he moved, like a thousand kisses on his body. Ahead—the noise, the light. He felt as light as air.

The crowd was primed, ready for a new star, and

some of them gasped loudly in awe when Rex made his entrance. Women shrieked with pleasure, men roared their approval. It went on and on, and Rex realized dimly that they didn't want to stop. They were on their feet, trying to show that as far as they were concerned the winner was onstage now. Mr. God. Rex had never heard of such a fantastic reception by an audience at any event, ever.

He flexed once, just a quick flash, silencing the hall in an instant. He felt like a conductor. A long breathless pause. He began to flex in sequence, but something went wrong immediately. His skin turned into a suit of crimson beads as blood welled up in every pore. Lightning branched through his brain, showers of pain washing over him. He flexed automatically, and the blood sprayed from his body—and it was replaced at once by more. If they see this, Rex thought absurdly, I'll lose. He launched into the full sequence, but in his nervousness he rushed it, and his movements were forced, jerky. Blood continued to fly out of him, the pain was overwhelming, but he held his place. A moment later two security men wearing medical masks approached cautiously, but the Ritalin was surging through him now and Rex easily flung them into the crowd—which was screaming with horror and delight.

He tried to stick to his program, but blood in his

eyes made it difficult to keep his balance. He changed position, and his feet now felt incredibly spongy. Something wrong, he repeated to himself, his mind a fog.

His body heaved once, then several more times, his diaphragm rocketing breath up into his head—and Rex felt the cotton wads shoot out of his nose in quick order. He caught a blurry glimpse of one of them as it unraveled slightly in the air. Blood washed freely down his face and chest now.

He could still hear, and the happy roar of the audience was gratifying. He had seen it in their faces—they loved him. He remembered that.

His flesh appeared to dissolve or melt from within, and Rex slowly sank to the floor. Bones gently pushed through his skin, which was turning into something soft and butter-like. Rex oozed out of himself, muscles still flexing automatically—but in a gradually diminishing pattern as they liquified.

Eventually, all that was left of Rex was a collapsed heap of bones in a large pool of radiant protoplasm—in which isolated ripples and flickers could still be seen an hour later.

— CD

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JOE R. LANSDALE
& DAVID E. WEBB

TRASH THEATRE

(Brought to you by those bastions of good taste, Joe R. Lansdale and David E. Webb, their own selves.)

Okay, we can't get back into our offices yet, due to all those damn snakes, which seemed to have bred under one of the couches and produced a whole flock of baby copperheads, and our exterminator is currently in the hospital.

Seems Billy Sue Constantine of *We Pest The Pests*, in spite of experience, misjudged the speed of a striking copperhead, and is now in the hospital with a vagina(1) the size of Richard Nixon's ego. We're talking big, so big the vagina sleeps in a chair beside the bed. I mean, you look over at Billie Sue, lying on her side, her vagina in that chair beside her, it looks like someone has put a box of heart-shaped Valentine candy there, rested the box on its side. That's exactly how it looks, except this box has a pulse.

While we're on such matters, we'd like to tell you this. Billie Sue, in that special spirit that's made her the life of many a smoker and bachelor party, told us a story about how her ex-husband, Floyd, who played second accordion in a polka band, while helping her eliminate rattlesnakes from an out-

house, decided to take a leak, only to discover that a rattlesnake had somehow curled up under the rim of one of the two-holers—actually, she said shit had caked up under there hard enough to form a ledge and the snake had gone to sleep on it—and something about the look of Floyd's vienna sausage doing the boogaloo above it's head, spitting wee-wee, perhaps resembling some reptilian mating ritual, or more likely a snaky challenge, excited the rattler, and in defiance, it rose out of there and struck Floyd four square on the penis(2).

Floyd stumbled from the out-house, fell out on the ground, the snake dangling from his joint(3) with the tenacity of a Jehovah Witness with his foot in the door. Billie Sue said the irony of it was, way it swelled up, it was the first time Floyd had a hard-on in a year, and damn if he couldn't use it. He died too. Billie Sue wouldn't suck the poison out. She said she'd promised her boyfriend her lips would touch no other bulbous, throbbing member but his. (Course, this was before she accidentally backed over her boyfriend while he was sleeping in the driveway next to his water dish.)

Billie Sue's story is for those who think Dave and Joe are a little

too raunchy. We offer it to you, the easily offended, and we offer our thanks to Billie Sue.

And further more, for those among you who wrote letters to say stuff like, "Gee, your column is too raunchy, I'm fifty years old," well, we're getting there ourselves, fifty we mean, and we can't seem to clean up a bit, least not in this column. It brings the fucking worst out in us.

In that spirit, let us pause to comment on all the negative mail we've received in the last month. To those letter writers we offer a heartfelt, Fuck You.

And, for the more overwhelming positive mail we've received, we'd like to offer our goddamnest thanks and gratitude, though if you want to put a dollar in your envelopes to help support culture here at *Trash Theater*, do so, as this will be our contribution to trickle-down economics, the benefactors being us, of course.

But, we're here for a movie column, aren't we?

Our situation is we got no Trash Theater to go to, and of course, that causes a loss of column ambience. We've really had trouble getting our spirits up. But tonight we may have the medicine for that, we have something special

for you. This column is being written by penlight, alternately between Dave and Joe, at *The Backroads Drive-In* just off I-20 near Bolivar, and folks, we're talking sad, momentous occasion here. This is the last night at *The Backroads*. Next week the dozer comes in and levels the place for construction of a new Wal-Mart.

That's the bad news. The good news is tonight, this last night, it's Dusk to Dawn for one dollar. And the features are: *The Bible*, *Viva Las Vegas*, and something that sounds pretty salty and may involve Billie Sue Constantine in one of her earlier careers as an accomplice to producing on film the exalted two-second "money shot"(4). Need we say more. The title is, *Clam Bake*.

This is one of those old-fashioned drive-ins with the playground up front. You'll remember, if you've gone to any drive-ins built before the mid-sixties. This was where the parents could send you after you'd knocked over your soft drink for the third time and put your buttery popcorn fingers on the car's upholstery so much mosquitoes were starting to stick to it.

And speaking of mosquitoes, we've got us a Skeeter Coil here, the original White Trash incense, rating right up there with used Kotex stuck to the bottom of the bathroom trash can and the runny, open sore smell of a busted sewage pipe out back of a trailer park. This Skeeter Coil stuff is serious, as well it ought to be. You see, every car is a temple and the humans inside are just sacrament, the body and the blood for one of God's favorite creatures, the skeeter—remember, it was his idea to put two of these motherfuckers on the ark.

Yes sir, the skeeter, just a little angel carrying a small prayer to heaven.

And when you light your Skeeter Coil, it's actually in reverence, all that incense, cause it ain't

like that shit actually kills or runs off skeeters. No sir, it attracts them. About the only way a skeeter will die from a Skeeter Coil, is if he's so drunk on your blood he lights on the goddamn coil and catches on fire.

Anyway, this is the last night at the drive-in here, and everyone has come to enjoy whatever fate has in store for them tonight. We're all optimistic. There hasn't been a killing here in a couple of months, and maybe some people have been storing up for this close-out night. The management has invited everyone to bring their BBQ pits and fixin's, so things are dangerous already, what with dozens of BBQ pits shooting flames ten feet into the air and idiots squeezing charcoal lighter fluid into the fires as casual as pissing on an ant nest. So intense is the flaming response, it's peeling the paint off the cars next to the cookers. I guess the management is allowing this cause they know they won't be selling too many of their hot dogs cooked on the weenie rotator, the one that passes the weenies by a sixty-watt bulb every few seconds. Way you know the weenies are done is they break into a sweat.

Dave here.

It's not even good dark yet, and already Joe is down at the front under the screen swinging wildly on the rickety swing set and making it dangerous for those passing by within swing-chain reach. He's already knocked the cowboy hat off one fella and a fight ensued, but Joe is unhurt because the guy fell down when first struck, and Joe, in a moment of good sportsmanship, kicked him in the head while he was there, and the man's children, ranging in age from five to twelve, have had to tote him back to his car, and come back for his wheel chair.

Well, I'm going to join Joe down at the swings. Looks like he's having a little trouble with a kid

over there. The little bully has pushed Joe off the swing set and is making him eat dirt up by the screen. And who knows, that wheel chair motherfucker might come back.

Mutually written movie report to follow.

The Bible (Actually they just do Genesis)

102 long goddamn minutes

Starring: John Huston, Michael Parks, Richard Harris, George C. Scott, Ava Gardner, Peter O'Toole, and a special guest appearance by God.

Directed: John Huston and narrated by J. Huston

Well, up here under the screen gives us a serious view, though the original screen has been replaced by a sheet of corrugated tin coated with Sherman Williams flat white paint. This makes the movie look as if it's being shown on a large, *Ruffles* potato chip. (It was all Joe could do to resist putting an "e" on the end of potato. Him and Dan Quale. D.W.)

We thought since we'd been missing a flock of Bible study classes, God would let a spectacle such as this make up for it. We see this, we ought to be good for a lot of lessons missed. We might even have some credit coming. We figure since we've spent so much church offering money on worldly goods (movies, Big Red, sody waters, *Weekly World News*, fire balls and peanut patties), that a few bucks given to the drive-in management will suffice as an offering. Hell, they're showing *The Bible* ain't they? They got to be good people.

Little ways into it, we got cricks in our necks straining to see Eve's bush, which was continually,

and artfully, concealed by shadow, a twist of the hip, and a lot of rear angle. Meaning a lot of ass was exposed, but shit, you can see that in an ad in a magazine. There was also this thing with her titties. They were covered by her hair, and when the wind blew, or she moved, the hair stuck to the titties. This is frustrating. We wondered what kind of glue was used to keep the hair on the titties.

Then there's this Michael Parks playing Adam. He hasn't got a hammer. No matter what he does, no matter from what angle he's shown, no hammer is visible, no plums swinging from side to side. Lot of gals are gonna be as disappointed as we are about Eve's bush and titties, and those of mixed persuasions ain't gonna get no thrill either. In fact, the bi-folks are gonna be double mad. Sometimes, art can be annoying.

Course, considering the way some of the cars out in the drive-in are rocking, it seems to have been enough to stimulate some of the less intelligent out here. Course, there's only one person in some of those cars, so God only knows what the hell they're doing.

But back to the movie. What's the deal with the serpent? He has Eve eat fruit from this forbidden tree, which God set up there to tease these two people, then Eve has Adam eat some of the fruit. Then Adam and Eve know suddenly they're without trousers, and that this stuff they been doing, this sticky business where they get dirt and leaves in their ass cracks and explore each other's nether parts, well, it's actually some nasty stuff. And up until then, they just thought they were having fun. Now Adam knows he has a pecker and it gives him no joy. And Eve, she's an asshole. She's the one fucked it up for the rest of us. Or what about the serpent? He pointed the fruit out, and lost his legs over it. Now he's been split into a zillion different species of

serpent, and some of them are still pissed about this and will bite you on account of it.

Poor Adam and Eve. God, who up until now, hasn't given one flying damn that his creations have been playing hide the salami, is suddenly pissed off, and he throws them out of the Garden of Eden. We don't get it. There's only two people in the world, they want to fuck in their garden and eat fruit off trees, what's the problem? It's not like they're gonna get bodily fluid stains on someone's upholstery or something.

Anyway, the movie is quite a Bible lesson, but by the Salty Dog of Abraham, it raised a few questions, some more confusing than the serpent, fruit, and fuck business discussed above.

Let's take this Noah guy. Wow, what a job the Big Man gave him.

"Round up all the animals two by two, Noah, and put them on the ark you got to build, because in my intimate mercy, I'm gonna drown every sonofabitch outside of your family. That way, you can all interbreed later."

"Wow," says Noah. "No shit?"

"No shit. Now, I want two elephants, two giraffes, two skeeters, two flies, two worms, two of every motherfuckin' species. I want . . ."

"God, excuse me," Noah might say. "But what about the other animals? The other giraffes, etc? They're not wicked. They'll be drowned with the evil folks."

"Fuck em. I want two hippos. Two of every ass-licking animal on the earth. Don't forget snakes, birds, flat worms, and heart worms . . ."

"Excuse me, Mr. God. Captain, sir. Don't you think, since you're like, you know, gonna drown the shit out of the world, we could lose the vermin. It's like a big chance."

"What? And decrease suffer-

ing? You think those little bastards are some mean shit, those flies and skeeters and worms, that ain't mean, wait until I invent AIDS."

"AIDS, Captain God, sir?"

"Ahead of your time. Look, I'm a busy deity here. Places to make, people to destroy, things to fuck up. Just do what I tell you."

"Yes sir."

Okay, dear readers, you add all those animals up and put em on a boat. You got to wonder how big's this boat? The Bible tells you, but still, it doesn't come out a boat that big. You couldn't get a family and the Lufkin, Texas petting zoo on a boat that size. You'd have serious trouble getting on a couple elephants. And say you got all the animals on the boat, and the rain starts, the weather changes, the barometric pressure shifts dramatically, man, we're talking some waste products here. For animals, something like that happens, it's like that first, hot cup of coffee in the morning. Some wee-wee is gonna fly. Then you got number two. And when you're talking big animals, you're talking some serious dumps. This is okay for the flies. They got to have this stuff to eat and live in, drop their babies, those cuddly little maggots, but say you're Shem, one of Noah's sons, and the barometric pressure shifts and you can't open a window fast enough, and then Noah, Dad, he comes to you with a shovel and a wheel barrow. You're gonna be busy, that's what we're trying to tell you. Get that finished, it's about time for the regular dumps these animals got to do.

And say Noah's got to house the tape worms and all. Who gets to be designated host?

"Shem, come here would you?" says Dad. "I got a little something I want you to swallow. Two of all these worms, and by the Great Asshole of God Almighty, don't you dare let your rotting teeth scrape, or in any way harm, one of these worms. God's own

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special little creatures."

And once the ark comes into port, and all the animals get off the magic boat, how long was it before the lions remembered who they were and scarfed a few bunnies? Or rather, why didn't they scarf a few bunnies? No telling how many species ceased to exist right there. You know, stuff like the gabblip. Don't hear about it much these days, do you? That's because Tony Tiger ate both those sonofabitches while they were, in their own animalistic way, praising the glory of God.

Or say one of a species got eaten. Well, in a few years there goes a whole race of animals. Maybe, in their haste to get off the boat, an elephant steps on some rare form of worm Shem has just regurgitated, killing out a whole future that would have been filled with some unique disease fueled by worms in shit. It could have been heartbreaking.

And now that we think about it, what were those animals eating on board? Some of the plant species brought along? Can lions and tigers and bears be vegetarians for forty days and forty nights? Did Noah bring a few extra bunnies to feed the carnivores? Plus, what about genetic diversity?

What were these animals and Noah's family drinking? Wee-wee? You got to have a lot of water for big critters and humans for forty days and forty nights. Was the water they were floating on fresh water? Maybe that's the answer. But if it was, how come the oceans didn't run into it and salt it up? There's some serious Biblical questions here that won't be answered in *The Old Testament index*.

Then we get the story of *The Tower of Babel*, where we meet Nimrod, whose kind of the top dog and looks like Alice Cooper with-out a snake.

Did you know everyone on earth once spoke the same language? Least until Nimrod in his

arrogance tried to build a tower so high and beautiful it would rival God.

God got so mad at Nimrod, he not only punished him, but all the innocents being forced to build the tower. Did it by causing them to speak different languages.

This fact cleans up a lot of linguistic problems. God made different languages in one stroke, as punishment. But knowing this, you got to ask some things. How long did it take everyone to teach someone else their language so at least two people could hang out together? And for there to be new races, once again, we're back to the serious fucking problem. One guy, he's speaking French, and this lady he meets, she speaks some Danish dialect, so they got to teach each other their language, decide what language they like best, which race they want to be, then some serious fucking and child raising is in order, and of course, to make this work, in God's fashion, lot of incest has to go on, cause teaching everyone a new language is a pain in the ass, takes up time.

Another point. About everyone in this movie is white. Where are the Brothers, and the Chinese? The Texans?

We could go on about other events in the movie, like the story of Lot, and how he was willing to offer his daughters to the bad people of Sodom to fuck in place of giving over a couple of angels he was protecting, who didn't need protection. Or we could talk about the part where later he fucked his daughters, and if this was in the Bible, why was it left out of the movie? It should have been there. In the Bible, God seldom missed an opportunity for some relative to fuck another relative. It was kind of a standard plot device, along with someone getting hurt or brutalized in some terrible fashion. God knew how to keep things from getting boring.

We could probably spend a

little time on Abraham, and how God tells him to kill his son as a test, just because God like to know where he stands in the hearts of his chosen people. But we did all that, we'd be here till about the time the new Wal-Mart was opening its doors.

But, before we move on to *Viva Las Vegas*, let us leave you with a movie snack suggestion for *The Bible*.

Unleaven bread. We brought with us some of Dave's hot water cornbread. We also brought a big container of black-eyed peas with sausage meat in them, but we guess that isn't Biblical. But the cornbread's close. There's no yeast in it, and you can sail it like a miniature frisbee if you get bored.

All right, all right. The *Cemetery Dance* Police are cutting us off, and we've still got the rest of the night to go, but we'll report on the other two movies next time.

Anyway, before we leave you, we got to admit we're in kind of a tizzy right now. The drive-in is surrounded by a tin and a three strand barb wire fence, and people stand in the woods nearby with their lawn chairs waiting for it to get dark, then they come out and hop over the fence and set up front near the screen.

One fella, with a lawn chair, has snagged his balls on the top wire and is yodeling like a Country and Western singer. People have all turned on their headlights illuminating the work for the ambulance drivers who've just arrived.

Some fool produced a pair of wire cutters, and before we could get to him, he cut the wire. You should have seen that wire spring twelve feet into the air, snapping into a tight coil, flinging the ole boy's nut sack into a thirty-foot, moonlit arc, terminating in a hole in one in some gravitationally impaired lady's Dr. Pepper cup, which fortunately, turned out to be well iced.

One of the E.M.T.s wrestled her to the ground, strained off the Dr. Pepper between his fingers, and is now screaming to keep them nuts on ice until they ship him off to Houston to get them hooked back up.

The ambulance has just whipped out of here, hot with lights and siren, smashing two ice-chests, a lawn chair, and something that had been moving under a blanket, but is now being ignored as the car lights and horns have ceased, and the projector is rolling, and here comes, *Viva Las Vegas!*

NOTES: (This means some little notes that explain confusing things in the text.)

(1) For our not so cultured readers, vagina is not a Southern state that fought for the Confederacy. It's a pussy. A poontang. A cunt. A gash. A slit. The honey hole. A happy, sucking wound. A weenie-squeezer. Snatch. The ole sausage grinder. The Venus Mound. Her womanhood, etc. Do we make ourselves clear?

(2) This is not, as David has suggested, a French word for several ballpoint pens. We're talking hammer here. Tool. Rod. The ole hanging meat. The piston. The bobbin' dog. The battering ram. The dick. The cock. The flesh pistol. The meat cutter. His manhood. Clear?

(3) See above.

(4) In porno films, when the meat pipe blows the mayonnaise, this is called "the money shot" because it's the one the viewers (mostly male) want to see.

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THOMAS F. MONTELEONE

THE MOTHERS AND FATHERS ITALIAN ASSOCIATION

The Little Boy Who Believed His Publisher Sorta-Kinda-Some: A Fable for Our Times

"Many, many thanks for your fine work in *Cemetery Dance*. I just wanted to say real quick how much I enjoy your work, and yes, I do turn to the MAFIA column first!"

—Richard A. Vierling,
Escondido CA

"I just don't get it with the strong language. Do you think that makes you more of a man? You diminish the subject matter of your columns with your ultra-informal style."

—Krista Beck, Provo UT

"How about a column about how you break into this business? It seems like you know everybody and have been everywhere. How did you do it? How can I be like you?"

—Bryan Kaminicki,
Pittsburgh PA

Okay, gang, here we are again. Hard to believe another three months have passed and it's time for another column. You should feel fortunate that I have a virtually inexhaustible supply of things to talk about, thus ensuring you of essays that are immensely enriching, informative, and maybe even a little entertaining for as long

as you subscribe to this magazine. To answer some of the above mail, let me say to Richard: *Thanks; to Krista: Writing in a formal style would be the literary equivalent of walking around with a broomstick up my ass (and that wouldn't make me more of a man, either); to Bryan: You cannot be like me (one of me is enough). You must go forth and become your own unique personality. Spread your wings, speak loud and write often if you are intelligent, and never worry about what other people think of you—unless they're paying your bills.*

But before we get started on the main topic of the day—a modern fable about the horrors of publishing (and so what else is new?)—there are a few items that deserve mention, require clarification, or simply that I want you to know about.

Last month, if you might recall, I talked about a comic that changed my life, that was in no small way, responsible for turning me into the mutant that I have been most of my life. I remembered myself being six years old when I found that comic, but had no idea what the title or date it might be. But I *wanted* to know. I even suggested that maybe one of you out there might be a goombah and search out this data for me. Well, I gotta tell you, friends, my

post office box was not exactly bursting with helpful notes from the great endomorphic mass of you.

In fact, I probably would still be ignorant of the title of *The Comic That Changed My World* if fate had not delivered me into the hands of my old bud, Harlan Ellison. You see, I happened to be hanging out at his legendary crib in L.A. around the July 4th weekend (the reason for my visit is another story and fit, perhaps someday, for inclusion in this space . . . but not today), and he happened to mention my last M.A.F.L.A. column. I told him I had *still* not discovered the name of *The Comic*, and Harlan, well, he just grinned his impish grin and said: "Don't you want to find out, man?"

"Hey, whadda you think?" I said.

Harlan was already leading me into the pool room where he pulled out two huge folio-sized books that looked very special. *The Photo-Journal Guide to Comic Books* compiled by Ernst and Mary Gerber. It was a massive 2-volume set of full color photographic reproductions of virtually *every* comic book cover ever printed (featuring 21,000 color illustrations). If you love comics, this Gerber compilation is an invaluable addition to

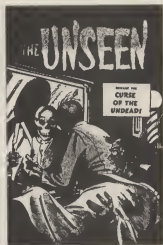
your library. So anyway, Harlan spreads out both books on the pool table—he takes Volume One (A-J); I start running through Volume Two (K-Z). What a weird and wonderful task. To flip through those pages is like flipping through the pages of your life. Memories rush at you from all sides as you see cover art you haven't seen in twenty or thirty years. We paged through the years, reminiscing and bullshitting, and generally enjoying ourselves. Harlan finished up Volume One, and there was no sign of the cover with the skull-faced barber. I was about halfway through Volume Two, and I hadn't seen it either. I was getting a little down, but Harlan says: "Don't worry, kiddo. It's in here somewhere!"

So we keep turning the pages and I'm down to *Tomb of Terror* and *Uncanny Tales* and still we've got nothin'. I'm running out of pages and I'm beginning to wonder if the comic ever existed; that even at the young age of 5 or 6, my imagination was so special that I created the whole episode and even a comic book cover completely from whole cloth; or that I have remembered it so wrongly that I have all the details wrong. Whatever the reason, I am not feeling very cool. We are in the U's and there aren't many pages left.

And then I turn the page, and Harlan says: "There it is! *The Unseen*!"

And I look off to the right on page 731 and I see it too. It's just a 1 1/4" panel with a lurid painting by Alex Toth, but I have chills running up and down me like a character in a cheap comic. I am looking at a cover I haven't seen in almost 40 years (it was truly *unseen*) and the damned thing is like some talisman, some piece of gris-gris that has power over me. If I do not experience a true epiphany, then it is something unerringly similar. Bending closer I put on my reading glasses and I examine the details:

"Terror That Stalks By Night!" is the subtitle; July, 1954 is the date (which means I was not 6 when I found this thing by the side of the road, but rather the wizened old age of 8[1]); "Curse of the Undead" is the title of the cover story; the perspective and the position of the figures in the painting are not exactly as I had remembered them—in fact, my mental composition was better, a little more dramatically posed.



But I am pleased. A lifelong question has been answered and I feel a sense of completeness that had been missing for all that time. I check a few more details and commit them to memory: published by the American Comics Group; Volume 15.

The only thing to add to this little vignette is that I have now begun my search for the actual comic itself. I don't want to re-read it as much as just *have* the damned thing. To possess it the way had possessed my memories for most of my life. If I find it, I might get it matted and framed, mount it to my wall like the psychological trophy that it is. It is not all of us who can successfully hunt down the elements of our lives that have so obviously shaped (warped?) us.

The good news is that *The Unseen* #15 is priced at \$25.00 in

good condition and \$60.00 in fine condition. The bad news is that I can't find it anywhere. And so I put it to you, my teeming, resourceful audience, that if any of you have this comic or have access to it, you will (a) send it to me as a gift, in exchange, let us say, for all the hours of enjoyment and enlightenment this column has afforded you over the years, or (b) in a moment of abject venality, *sell* it to me (c) write me to tell me who's got it, so that I might buy it from them or trade for it.

The mailing address (which has changed) is:

P.O. Box 146
Brooklandville MD 21022

and I await hearing from the faceless, smirking herd that is all of you.

Another short subject before the Feature Attraction:

If Demosthenes is still out there, searching for an honest man, he can search no more, because I've found him . . .

. . . and his name is Rick Lieder.

This guy, for the few of you who cannot be called *cognoscenti*, is a wonderful artist I met maybe 9 or 10 years ago at the first World Fantasy Convention they held in Tucson. We were both interested in the same young lady, as I recall, but my memory becomes suddenly clouded when I try to recall with whom she decided to pass some time. Regardless, I admired Rick's art, which was and is a combination of photography, computer graphics, and other ultra-tech media. Rick is responsible for the gorgeous covers on my series of *Borderlands* anthologies. He is welcome to do them as long as he likes and as long as he can put up with my embarrassingly low pay rates.

Anyway, I said he is indeed an

honest man, and I say this because he sent back a check I sent him for cover art when I mistakenly paid him twice. The man is a *mensch*, as they say, and he deserves recognition on a national platform such as this magazine. If everybody did biz like Rick Lieder, it would be a nice world in which to work.

But they don't; and it ain't. And that's why we have the following fable:

Once upon a time there was an imaginative boy who came up with a wonderful idea for a novel. He took the idea to his representative in the great and magical city of Gotham and his representative, or "agent," as he is known, took the wonderful idea to a group of people who occupy the whole floor of a building and call themselves "The Publisher."

The publisher liked the boy's idea. So much, in fact, that they paid the boy a goodly sum of money for the idea to be turned into a book.

And so the idea for a book became known as "The Work" and the boy became known as "The Author."

A nice enough appellation, to be sure, but the boy was humble and didn't need to be called an author to know that he was a writer. He continued to think of himself as simply "the boy."

And so shall we.

In the fullness of time, the boy finished "The Work" and turned it in to "The Publisher." He was told it was a wonderful book, but it needed to be "edited" which is a process in which people who haven't got the stones to be writers themselves tell you what you *really* meant to say and how to say it better than you did. Anyway, after "The Work" was edited, the boy was again told what a great and wonderful book it was. He was also told of many great and wonderful plans "The Publisher" had

for "The Work." Among these plans, he was told that there would be 40,000 hardcovers of his book printed, that there would be ads in the major publications like *Publishers Weekly* and the *New York Times Book Review*, that there would be press/publicity kits available and when the paperback was printed, there would be fancy display boxes (called "dumps") full of his books.

This is called Blowing Sunshine Up Your Ass, but, alas, the boy did not know this at the time.

Months passed, and as the day approached for the scheduled publication of the boy's wonderful book, the boy spoke to some other boys who wrote books—some a little older and perhaps a little wiser—and they told him he should maybe-kinda-sorta not believe everything his Publisher told him. The boy listened to their advice and he decided to help his Publisher's effort to promote and market his book. He did this by (a) printing several thousand postcards with a picture of the book in full color, (b) sending the cards to reviewers and radio station producers, (c) sending a press release about his book to the wire services, (d) hiring a private publicist to help get his book noticed.

He arranged to meet with his Publisher's own Publicity Director, and he was excited to tell the Director how much he had done to help. Imagine his bemusement when the Publicity Director seemed less than pleased.

"You don't need to do any of that," said the Director. Her voice was a combination of admonishment and anger. "We'll take care of everything."

"Will you even set up signings and appearances at the bookstores?" said the boy.

"Of course!" said the Director.

"And will you get me interviews in the newspapers?"

"A snap!" said the Director.

Now, despite these promises,

the boy had already spent a lot of time and money on his own preparations, so he figured the more the better, right?

What happened next was very interesting. The boy waited for bookstores to call him for signings, but nobody did—so the boy called around, sent postcards, and set up his *own* signings. The boy also waited for his local newspapers to interview him, but nobody did—so he called and sent postcards and he got *himself* interviewed. Even got his picture in the papers with the article. And since he was a nice looking boy and didn't look like a troglodyte, that was pretty neat, too.

Just about then, the boy's book got reviewed in *Publishers Weekly* with a * next to it, which means they think it's a really good book. The boy's private publicists started sending the book everywhere (and every time they asked for more review copies from the boy's Publisher, they had a hard time getting them . . . isn't that odd?).

And then, the boy started getting invited to speak on radio shows all over the country (his postcard worked!). His book started getting rave reviews all over the country in major newspapers and magazines (his private publicists' phone calls and follow-ups worked!). And then, the boy started signing his book at bookstores in various cities and guess what?—he was selling out of all the copies the stores had (which wasn't very many when you thought about it if they had printed all those copies—40,000, wasn't it?)

And then a very wonderful thing happened: The boy's book got reviewed by *The New York Times* and they loved it! They even picked it as a *Notable Book of the Year*, which only happens to about 200 books out of the 50,000 or so published each year.

Clearly, the boy had created something special.

Pretty soon, nobody could find the book anywhere. It was Sold Out. The boy asked his Publisher for more, but they said they were "Out of Stock."

"Gee," said the boy. "You sold all 40,000?"

"Well, not exactly . . ."

"Well *what* exactly?" said the boy.

"Well," said his Publisher.

"We were going to print 40,000, but then it was decided that we would print 20,000, but something happened between the time it was decided and the time to start the presses and the number changed to 10,000, but by the time our Sales Rep got finished with it, I think the actual number of books printed is something like 7,500."

To which the boy could only say: "What . . . ???"

"That's the fact, Jack," said his Publisher.

"Well," said the boy, "Are you going to do a second printing?"

"No," said his Publisher. "We're going to wait for the paperback."

And so, despite great reviews and more than 60 radio interviews and book signings in lots of different cities, the boy's book was largely unavailable.

"But that's okay," said the Publisher. "We're going to print lots of paperbacks—at least 350,000. maybe even *more!*"

"Yeah," said the boy.

But, buoyed by his own successful efforts, the boy waited for the paperback to appear, and then set up his own schedule of book signings in as many stores as he could manage in a 4-month period. These appearances went very well, and he averaged at least 25-30 books sold at each signing. Some of them, in high-traffic locations would net him 50-100 sales in a couple of hours. He was so good, most of the bookstores wanted him to come back.

But there was something

about these signings that embarrassed the boy, made him feel bad. He had told all the bookstores that they could order dumps for his book, that they could get promotional materials and publicity kits from his Publisher . . . but his Publisher told the bookstores: "Huh? We don't have any dumps or promotions kits for that boy's book—what're you talking about?"

Still. The book was doing well in paperback, but a strange thing was happening. No one could ever find the book on a newsstand or a K-Mart or a food store chain or . . . *anywhere*, if not in a bookstore. What was happening? Were the bookstores selling all their copies? Were there so few returns that the newsstands weren't getting any?

The boy asked his Publisher how the sales were going.

"Great," said the Publisher. "Those 175,000 copies are just going like crazy. They're even talking about a second printing!"

"But," said the boy. "I thought you printed 350,000?"

"Well, we were," said his Publisher. "But it was decided that maybe the Sales Reps couldn't move that many, so the numbers got re-adjusted."

By this time, the boy wasn't listening so hard anymore. He had begun to realize that it really didn't matter what his Publisher told him. Didn't matter at all.

But as they say in those late-night commercials: *Wait! There's more!*

It came to pass that the boy's book received favorable attention from his peers, his fellow writers. They liked it so much that they nominated it as the best book of the year. Every year, the writers held a banquet and gave out awards. And every year, the Publisher would invite its writers, including the boy, to sit at its table. Now, naturally the boy was happy to see his book on the final ballot, so he asked his Publisher if he would be invited to sit at the Pub-

lisher's table.

The Publisher said: "Yes, of course, but we are not buying any of our writers banquet tickets—it's getting too expensive, we're sure you understand, but please sit with us anyway."

Now, the boy thought this was a bit odd, but he agreed with the arrangement until the evening he arrived at the banquet and discovered—how odd!—that his Publisher had lied to him. The boy discovered that the Publisher had indeed bought tickets to the banquet for other writers, but *not* the boy.

The boy did the only thing he could do—he sat at another table. Clearly, his Publisher was not that interested in having him at their table. Clearly, his Publisher did not care if they insulted him, or hurt him, or embarrassed him.

And so, later that evening, the boy's book actually *won* the award for superior achievement. The boy was very happy. When he accepted the award, he didn't even mention his Publisher. How could he?

Soon after that, the boy decided he could not write any more books for the Publisher. It was a business decision.

The boy was sad, but wiser.

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The boy who believed his publishers sorta-kinda-some couldn't wait to see his royalty statement.

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CRASH CART

NANCY HOLDER

NANCY HOLDER's short stories have appeared in most of the field's major magazines and anthologies, and she recently made her novel debut in the horror genre with *Making Love*, a collaboration with Melanie Tcm. "Crash Cart"—as disturbing as any tale you'll ever read—is her second appearance in *Cemetery Dance*.

Alan sat for a long moment with his eyes closed, allowing his fatigue and disappointment to wash through him like a gray haze. Felt himself drifting and sinking; if he didn't move, he would fall asleep. He opened his eyes and picked up his soup spoon, and was shocked at the amount of fresh blood on the sleeve of his scrubs. Perhaps he should have changed into fresh ones.

Then he looked down at his bowl of cream of spinach soup, and winced: It looked just like the stuff that had backed up through the feeding tube in Elle Magnuson's stomach two hours ago as she lay dying. That crap seeping out, then the minor geyser when her son tried to fix it.

Christ, why the hell had her family done that to her in the first place? All the Enfamil had done was feed the tumor, for weeks and days and hours, and the last, awful few seconds. Code Blue, and they had yelled and screamed for him to do something, even though everyone had spoken so rationally about no extraordinary measures when she had been admitted. Her daughter shrieking at him, shouting, crying. Her son, threatening to sue. Par for the course, Anita Guzman had assured him. She'd been a nurse for twenty years, and *hombre*, she had seen it all.

Dispiritedly, he slouched in his chair. He had really liked that old lady. Her death touched him profoundly; his sorrow must show, for no one came to sit with him in the cafeteria. He looked around at the chatting groups of two's and three's. How long before he became the type of doctor for whom nobody's death moved him? Par for the long haul, years and years of feeding tubes and blood. Why had he ever thought he wanted to be a doctor?

Maybe she had been special, and they wouldn't all

be this way. Maybe that's why the feeding tube and the shrieking and the threats. It was so hard to let go, of certain people especially.

He pushed the soup away, marveling that he had been stupid enough to order it in the first place. He really had no appetite for anything. Which was bad; he had hours to go until his shift was over. He didn't understand why they worked first-year residents to death like this. He never had a chance to catch up; he always felt he was doing a half-assed job because he was so tired. What if he made a mistake that cost someone their life?

What if he could have done something to save Elle Magnuson? She'd been terminal; he knew that. But still.

Alan unwrapped a packet of crackers and nibbled on one. They would settle his stomach. Maybe. If anything could. Last Tuesday, when he had asked Mrs. Magnuson how she was feeling, she had opened her bone-dry mouth and said, "I sure would love a lobster dinner." And they looked at each other—no more lobster dinners for Elle Magnuson, ever, unless they served them in the afterlife. Jesus, how had she stood it? Spiraling downward so damn fast—her other daughter hadn't made it from Sacramento in time. It had been a blessing, that last, brutal slide, but it didn't seem that way now.

He dropped the cracker onto his food tray and wiped his face with his hands.

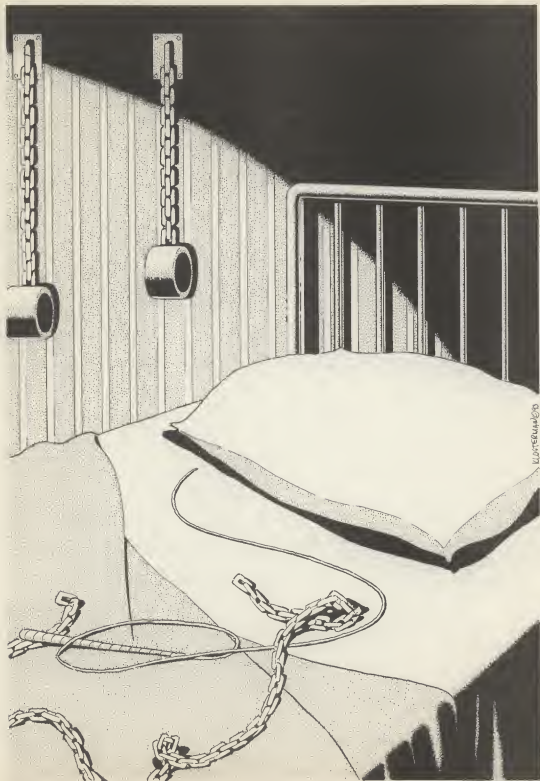
"Oh, God, Jonesy! God!" It was Anita. She was bug-eyed. She flopped into the chair across from his and picked up his soup spoon. "You're not gonna believe this!"

Before he could say anything, she threw down the spoon and grabbed his forearm. "Bell's wife was brought into the ER."

"What?"

"Yeah. And he comes flying in after the ambulance, just screaming, 'I want my wife! Right now!'" She imitated him perfectly except for her accent. "I want her out of here!"

Shocked, Alan opened his mouth to speak, but Anita went on. "Then they strip her down, and she's



covered with welts, Alan. Cigarette burns. Bell's absolutely ballistic. And the paramedics drag MacDonald—that new ER guy?—over to a corner, and tell him there are whips and chains on their bed and manacles on the wall, and in the corner there's a fucking *crash cart*. She gripped his arm and leaned forward, her features animated, her eyes flashing. "Do you know what I'm saying?"

He sat there, speechless. Eagerly she bobbed her head. "A crash cart," she said with emphasis. A crash cart, with the paddles that restarted your heart. A crash cart, that brought you back from the dead. In the Chief of Surgery's house.

For his wife.

He reeled. "Holy shit."

Her nails dug into him. "He would torture her so badly she'd go into cardiac arrest. Then he'd bring her back."

"With the crash cart?" His voice rose, cracked. He couldn't believe it. Bell was his mentor; Alan looked up to him like a father. Occasionally they talked about getting together to play chess. This had to be an April Fool's joke. In January.

"Believe it, *mi amor*," Anita bounced in her chair. "He's in custody." Alan stared at her. "I'm telling you the truth!"

"Bullshit" he said savagely.

"Is not! Go see for yourself. His wife's been admitted."

Numb. Scalp to sole. He ran his hand through his hair. A joke, a really stupid joke. Sure. Anita was Guatemalan and she had this very strange sense of humor. Like the time she had stuck that stuffed animal in the microwave. Now that was just sick . . .

"C'mon," she said, grabbing his wrist as she leaped to her feet. "Let's go check her out."

"Anita."

"C'mon. Everyone's going up there."

He'd often wondered what Dr. Bell's wife was like; there were no photos of her in Bell's office. He had imagined her beautiful, talented, supremely happy despite the fact that she and Dr. Bell had no children.

He jerked his hand away. "No," he said hoarsely. "I don't want to see her. And I think it's gross that you—"

"Oh, lighten up. She's unconscious, you know."

"I'm surprised at you." Although in truth he had peeked in on other patients whom doctors and nurses had talked about—the crazies, the unusual diseases, even the pretty women.

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" Anita laughed at him and let go of his arm. "Well, I'm going. I have twenty minutes of dinner left. It's room 512, if you're interested. Private. Of course."

"I'm not interested."

"Suit yourself." She grabbed his cracker packet

and took the uneaten one, popped it in her mouth. "Eat your soup. You're too skinny."

She flounced away. At the doorway of the cafeteria, she saw more people she knew, and greeted them with a cry. "Guess what!" and they followed her out of the cafeteria.

Alan sat, unable to focus, to think. He couldn't believe it. He just couldn't believe it. Not Bell. Not this. It was a vicious rumor; he knew how fast gossip traveled in the hospital, and how much of it was a load of crap.

His stomach growled. During the long minutes he sat there, the soup developed a film over the surface. A membrane. He stared at it, thought about puncturing it. Making an incision. Making it the way it had been.

With a sigh he covered it with his napkin. Rest in peace, cream of spinach soup.

He jumped out of his chair when St. Pierre, a fellow resident, clapped him on the shoulder and said, "Jesus, Al, you hear about the old man?"

"Yeah." He wiped his face. "Yeah, I did."

Then he went into the men's room, thinking he would vomit. Instead, he cried.

♦ ♦

At one in the morning, he went to the fifth floor. The nurses were busy at the station; he wore a doctor's coat and had a doctor's "I belong here" gait, and no one challenged or even noticed him.

The door to 512 was ajar. There was no chart.

A dim light was on, probably from the headboard.

He stood for a moment. Gawking like the other sickos, like someone slowing at an accident. Shit. He turned to go.

Couldn't.

Pushed open the door.

He walked quietly in.

She lay behind an ivory curtain; he saw the outline of her in her bed. The lights were from the headboard and they reflected oddly against the blank white wall, a movie about to begin, a snuff show. He walked past the curtain and looked sharply, quickly to the right, to see her all at once.

Oh, God. Black hair heaped in tangles on the pillow. IV's dangling on either side. An oxygen cannula in her nose. He drew closer. Her small face was mottled with bruises and cuts, but it could have been pretty, with large eyes and long lashes, and a narrow, turned-up nose. He couldn't tell what her mouth was like; it was too swollen.

She stirred. He didn't move. He was a doctor. He had a right to be here. He flushed, embarrassed with himself. All right, call it professional curiosity.

Gawking.



There were stitches along the scalp line. Jesus. He reached toward her but didn't touch her. Stared at the bruises, the long lashes, the poor lips. He saw in his mind Dr. Bell manacing her to the wall, doing . . . doing things . . .

. . . making her heart stop, my God, my God, what a fucking monster . . .

But what about her?

He wouldn't let that thought go farther, wouldn't blame the victim. He'd been commended last month for his handling of the evidence collection for a rape case. Dr. Bell had written a glowing letter: "Dr. Jones has shown a remarkable sensitivity toward his patients."

Dr. Bell. God. *Dr. Bell.*

How could she? How could she let him? Until her heart stopped. Until she was clinically *dead*.

Mrs. Magnuson had clung to life with a ferocity that had proven to be her detriment—cream of spinach—making her linger and suffer, almost literally killing the fabric of her family as they began to unravel under the strain.

He stared at her. And suddenly, he felt a rush of . . .

. . . anger . . .

so fierce he balled his fists. The blood rushed to his face; he clenched his teeth, God, he was so pissed off. He was—

"Jesus." Shocked, he took a step backward.

She stirred again. He thought she might be trying to speak, coming up from whatever she was doped up on.

In the corridor, footfalls squeaked on the waxed Linoleum. He felt an automatic flash of anxiety, a little boy sneaking around in places he shouldn't be. Mrs. Magnuson had called him "son" and "honey," and he had liked her very much for it.

The footfalls squeaked on and he shook his head at his reaction. There were few places in the hospital he was actually barred from entering. His mind flashed on Dr. Bell shuffling through the morgue like some demented ghoul; sickened, he shut his eyes and decided to leave.

Instead, he found himself standing closer to her. His hand dangled near all those black curls; and for an instant, he thought hard about picking up some of those curls and pulling—

—hard—

"Jesus." He spoke the word aloud again and wiped his face with his hand. What the hell was wrong with him?

He had a hard-on. He couldn't believe it; he stepped backward and hurried from the room.

♦ ♦

Down the corridor, where the physicians' showers were, he washed his face with cold water and dried it with a paper towel. His hands shook. He staggered backward and fell onto a beechwood bench that lined the wall. Across from him, gray lockers with names loomed over him: Jones, Barnette, Zuckerman. Dr. Bell had no locker here; of course he had his own office, his own facilities.

Hurting her.

Jesus. He buried his face in his hands, still shaking. Mrs. Magnuson would be absolutely incapable of believing what he had been thinking while he was in 512.

And what had that been?

He stood and walked out of the room. It was time to go home; he was overtired, overstimulated. Too much coffee, too much work. Losing the old lady. Mrs. Magnuson. She had a name. They all had names. But what was *her* name?

Mrs. Bell. Ms. Bell. What was the difference?

He hurried back down the corridor and back into 512.

She lay behind the curtain; the play of shadow and white somehow frightened him, but her silhouette drew him on. He almost ran to her; he was panting. He had another erection, or perhaps he had never lost the first one. He was propelled toward her, telling himself he didn't want to be here, didn't want, to, didn't. She was unconscious: Sleeping Beauty.

He touched her forearm. There were bruises, cigarette burns. Scars. Didn't her friends wonder? Did she have no friends? Bell was so friendly and outgoing, kind. He would have had lots of parties. He talked about barbecuing. His special sauce for ribs.

His chess proficiency, teasing Alan in a gentle way, telling him how he'd beat him if they ever played. Beat him.

Alan found a place that had not been harmed and pressed gently. He moved his hand and pressed again.

On top of a bruise.

Pressed a little harder.

His erection throbbed against his scrubs. His balls felt rock-hard; God, he wanted—

—he wanted—

He pressed again, this time on a cigarette burn. Touched his cock. It was so hard. He was short of breath, and he wanted her so badly. He wanted—

He pinched the burn with the tips of his fingers, his short nails. He felt so dizzy he thought he might fall into her bed; he hoped he would. Swimming through something hot and active and moving; with volition and something so powerful, he stretched out his hand and cupped her breast. Squeezed her nipple. Squeezed harder.

She stirred. Her two blackened eyes fluttered open. He did not remove his hand. More blood was rushing to his cock, if that were possible. He was swaying with desire. The room spun. Those black



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eyes, staring at him, filled with tears as she smiled weakly.

"It's . . . okay," she whispered.

He jerked his hand away and drew it beneath his chin as if it had been severely injured.

"It's okay," she said again.

"I . . . I . . ." He averted his head as bile rose in his throat; he was sick to death; God, what had he been doing?

Her voice came again: "It's okay." Pleading. The hair rose on the back of his neck.

Oh, Christ, she wanted him to hurt her.

He wanted to do it.

As this time the vomit flooded his mouth, he ran from the room.

◆ ◆

He didn't take a shower or change his scrubs. In the cold light of his car, he avoided the rearview mirror. He dropped the housekeys twice. His mouth tasted of sickness; he thought of Mrs. Magnuson's cream of spinach soup.

His roommate, Katrina, who was also a doctor but was not his girlfriend, had left on the TV without the sound; a strange habit of hers—she did that when she studied. There was a note that someone had called about the bicycle he wanted to sell. The bicycle. His patient had died and he had molested—

—tortured—

—crash cart—

He opened the fridge and grabbed a beer. Put it back and got Katrina's bottle of vodka out of the freezer. Swigged it. He felt so sick. He felt so disgusting.

There were sounds in her room. Deliberately he reduced his noise level; if she asked him what was wrong, he wouldn't be able to tell her.

Because he didn't know.

◆ ◆

An hour later, puking his brains out. Katrina hovering in the background, muttering about God knew what. Praying to the ghost of Mrs. Magnuson, dreaming of Ms. Bell.

Of her versatile heart.

Of the power and the need of that heart.

that so often stopped,

that so often started.

Oh, God.

"What happened tonight?" Katrina was asking, had been asking, over and over and over. "What happened?"

"Lost a patient," he managed between bone-rattling heaves. His knees knocked the tequila bottle and

it arced as if they were playing Spin-the-Bottle; they had agreed to be platonic and it had never been a problem. He liked her enormously, respected her.

"Oh, God, Alan. Oh." She stroked his hair. She had a glass of water at the ready; she was solicitous that way. If she'd known what he had done, she would probably move out. At the very least. Maybe she would have him arrested and thrown out of medicine.

"Mrs. Magnuson." He had told Katrina about her.

"Oh, I'm sorry." Soothing, sweet. He could feel himself shriveling inside. He was sick.

He was sick.

"Alan, drink this water." Rubbed his back, rubbed his shoulders.

It's okay.

He sobbed.

◆ ◆

A few hours passed; he dozed, then slept. Finally at about seven he woke and realized he hadn't been very drunk; except for a draining sensation of fatigue, he was all right. Katrina left him some toast and a couple of aspirin and a note that said, "I'm really sorry. Hope you feel better."

He showered and changed his clothes, forced down the toast but not the aspirin, had coffee, and drove to the hospital. He had to talk to her, to apologize, to make what couldn't be right, right.

No one paid him much notice when he went into the hospital—a few bobbed heads, a mild expression of surprise that he was back so soon. He pushed the button for the staff elevator; as he waited, a young nurse whose name he couldn't remember joined him. She said, "Did you hear about Dr. Bell?" His terse nod cut off the conversation.

The elevator came. They both went in. He pushed five and stood apart from her, his hands folded. He watched the numbers; at four she left with a little smile. She was very pretty. As pretty as Ms. Bell might be.

The doors opened. Her room was to the left.

He turned right and walked into one of the supply rooms.

Got a hypo.

He put it in his trouser pocket and headed back toward the left. Perspiration beaded his forehead and his hands were wet. He felt cold and tired.

Filled with nervous anticipation.

Sick, Sick. He was almost to her room. He felt the hypo through the paper wrapper. He was going to stick it someplace. Into her shoulder, maybe, or her wrist.

Or her eye.

His erection was enormous; it had never been this

big, or hard, or wanting.

God. He sagged against her door. Tears spilled down his face. He held onto the transom and took deep breaths.

He was going to go in there and she would want it.

"No," he murmured, but he was about to explode. "No."

"Hey." He started, whirled around. Anita Guzman stood in the hall. "You okay?"

"Man." He wondered if she could see his erection; as she stood looking at him, it started to go down.

"They're going to fry him," Anita hissed, lowering her voice. "Fucking fry that *chingada* asshole."

"What . . . ?" he asked faintly.

She blinked. "You don't know." She made a helpless shrug. "I had to pull an extra shift. Alan, Bell's wife died last night."

His heart jumped. "No."

She nodded vigorously. "It was her heart. They took her to ICU but—"

"No." He ducked his head inside the room. The ivory curtain was there, the form stretched behind it. He walk-ran toward her, his chest so tight that his breath stopped.

The dark curls, the small face. He whirled

around. Anita stood in the doorway. He said, "But she's still here."

"No. I had the room wrong," she whispered, wrinkling her nose in confession. "Mrs. Bell was up on the sixth."

His stomach cramped and the room began to tilt crazily; with a trembling hand, he gripped the edge of the bed. "Then . . . who is this?"

Anita came around the curtain and barely looked at her. "I don't know. But it isn't Bell's wife. This place is full of battered women, you know? Well, I gotta get back." She gave him a wave, which he didn't return.

Not Bell's wife. Not Bell's work.

But partly his.

Dr. Bell, so kind and generous. Dr. Jones, so sensitive.

This place is full . . .

The woman opened her eyes. Her gaze met his, held it, would not let him look away. His penis bobbed inside his underwear.

"It's okay," she murmured. Her broken mouth smiled weakly. "Please. It really is."

— CD

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A CONVERSATION WITH POPPY Z. BRITE

CONDUCTED BY TYSON BLUE

CEMETERY DANCE: We'll start things off with a question people ask me all the time—is that your real name?

POPPY Z. BRITE: Of course it's my real name! Would I publish my work under someone else's name? Not with this Gemini ego.

CD: Like a lot of writers, you've been telling stories as long as you can remember, and unlike many writers, you've got the proof—the cassette tape of your original story, "The Bad Mouse," recorded live at age three. How long had you been telling stories before that, and how did that recording (a) come to be made and (b) stay extant to this day?

PZB: As far as I know, I came forth from the womb with that kind of fucked-up shit in my head, and began verbalizing it as soon as I could. For those who haven't heard the tape yet, "The Bad Mouse" is the story of a Dahmeresque rodent who plays evil pranks, such as gluing kids' toys to the ceiling, and dismembers and eats people until he is redeemed by his own creativity (baking an all-different-color cake). It's graphic, gleeful, and chock-full of purple prose—not so different from my work today.

The tape was just something my parents hung onto, like you

would your kid's drawings or stories or whatever. I have a bunch of those too, but "The Bad Mouse" is the crowning glory of my childhood.

CD: If I'd told a story like "The Bad Mouse" when I was three, my parents would've had me locked up somewhere. What were your folks like, and how did they react to the bent your stories took, assuming they were all along the same delightfully gruesome lines?

PZB: My parents are both intelligent weirdos, though not in the way you might expect. I am not the spawn of drug-crazed hippies, as some people assume (though I sometimes perpetuate this notion by claiming they named me after their opium habit). My mother, particularly, has always encouraged me to be creative, to do what I loved, and she has done everything she could to help me along. My dad, too—he gave me the tape recorder!

All my early stories weren't like "He would bite their nose off and eat it, and he didn't mind, he would even eat their boogers!" Some were nice. Some were about characters from *Charlotte's Web* and *Stuart Little*. When I was five, I wrote to E.B. White so many times that he finally wrote me a personal letter back. But most of them were twisted in some way. At

five I also tried to read *The Bell Jar* and wanted to be a coroner.

CD: What came between "The Bad Mouse" and your first published work? To put it a different way, what sort of things did you do to develop your storytelling skills before we all found out who you were?

PZB: As far as I'm concerned, the things that develop storytelling skills are writing, reading, and experience. All writers, by definition, write often, and most of them read—I don't trust writers who say they don't have time to read. But when I read boring fiction, I often think the writer must not have enough adventure in his life. The creative mind needs a certain amount of chaos.

Some people act as if my life is an exotic whirlwind of strange and fascinating occurrences, and maybe it is, but it doesn't just fall into my lap that way. I work to make it so. I travel, I seek out other mutants, I stir up trouble where I can. Boredom is sufficiently deadly to me that I will spend the rest of my life trying to make sure I don't encounter it.

CD: What was your first published work?

PZB: It was a short story called "Optional Music for Voice and Pi-



Photo by Bernardo

ano," about a singer whose voice drives people to suicide and murder. David Silva bought it and published it in the Winter 1985 issue of *The Horror Show*. Dave also published my next six stories, including two in the Fall 1987 Rising Stars issue.

CD: Your author bio. lists a long line of unusual occupations you've held over the years. Did any of these do more for your development than pay the bills, and if so, how?

PZB: I generally say that everything is grist for the mill. But as jobs go, some have been very interesting, some have been corrosive to my soul, and a few (such as stripping at the Tattletale Lounge, a fancy nightclub in Atlanta) have been both. I'm not sorry I had any of those jobs, but since early 1991

I have made my living solely as a writer, and that was always my pure ideal. I did other things to pay the bills, as you say, but I never considered any other career. I knew I had to make it as a writer because I wasn't fit for anything else!

CD: Who are the writers whose work influenced yours while you were getting started? Who do you read?

PZB: I cut my teeth on Ray Bradbury, Stephen King, Shirley Jack-

son, Sylvia Plath, Peter Straub (particularly *Shadowland*), Harlan Ellison, John Bellairs, Ramsey Campbell, Carson McCullers, Flannery O'Connor, Fritz Leiber, William S. Burroughs. Those were some of my main early influences, but I read all sorts of things; still do. More recently I have fallen in love with the works of Dennis Cooper, Thomas Ligotti, Truman Capote, and Kathe Koja. I like some very poetic purple prose—Dylan Thomas, Baudelaire, Poe, Lovecraft. Some of my favorite contemporary horror and suspense writers include Robert McCammon, Brian Hodge, Dan Simmons, David J. Schow, Doug Winter, Beth Massie, Roberta Lannes, Michael Slade, Marcel Montecino, Joe Lansdale, Wayne Allen Sallee, Jessica Amanda Salmonson, S.P. Somtow, James Lee Burke, Melanie and Steve Rasnic Tem,

Charles de Lint, Christopher Fowler . . . I could go on for pages. I read everything by Stephen King; to me, he just gets better and better. There is so much cool stuff being done in horror right now, and that's just one kind of fiction out of all the kinds I like. I also enjoy true-crime books about serial killers (Jeffrey Dahmer is my current love), cyberpunk fiction and nonfiction (Bruce Sterling, William Gibson, et al), and underground comics . . . but don't even get me started on those!

An important formative influence for me was the anthology *Dark Forces*, edited by Kirby McCauley. I read it at age thirteen or fourteen, back when I was buying all the horror on the newsstand, most of which was crap. *Dark Forces* was one of my first intimations of just how cool horror could be, how much could be done within the genre. The stories by Edward Bryant, Charles L. Grant, and Joe Haldeman were particularly dear to me. Also King's *The Mist*, of course.

CD: What is your average day like? Do you write every day, on a regular schedule, as the urge takes you, etc.?

PZB: I really have no average day. It all depends on what I'm working on. If I'm doing short stories, I try to cut myself a little slack, give the old inspiration a chance to strike. But if I'm working on a novel—especially the second half of a novel—I have to get into a stride, plunge in deep, alienate my friends and write all the time. Toward the end of *Drawing Blood* (my second novel with Abyss; the hardcover is due out November '93) I was often writing fifteen, twenty hours a day. I wouldn't want to live like that all the time, but it can be quite a rush! I do most of my work between ten at night and four in the morning.

CD: Do you listen to music when

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you work? Whose? Do you find that different artists work better for certain moods or types of story?

PZB: Yes, I almost always listen to music while working. While writing *Lost Souls* I listened to many of the bands mentioned in the story—the Cure, Bauhaus, R.E.M., Tom Waits (my single favorite musician of all time). Nine Inch Nails' first album *Pretty Hate Machine* became



the unofficial soundtrack for *Drawing Blood*, but when I was writing the sex scenes the two main characters, Trevor and Zach, always insisted on Julee Cruise's *Into The Night*. They were willful that way. I also like some industrial music, weird old country, old jazz and swing, and KISS (the first band I ever truly adored)!

I ran into Peter Buck, R.E.M.'s guitarist, here in the French Quarter right after I moved back, and he said he'd bought *Lost Souls* in Athens, loved the book and got a kick out of being mentioned in it!

CD: One criticism that's been leveled at your first novel, *Lost Souls*, is that there isn't a single likeable character in the whole book. What's your response to that?

PZB: Well, I like them; in fact I love them. And that's all that really matters, isn't it? It is extremely gratifying when others enjoy my

work, but I don't try to aim it at some preconceived audience. I can't. I write what I have to, what I love. If it reaches people who can also love it and use it, great—but if I was in a cave somewhere in Tibet, I'd still be doing it.

My characters are very much themselves; they are not puppets or cardboard cutouts; their tastes, their preferences, their morals are different from most people's. Some readers can't handle that. Most can. Every fan letter I've received for *Lost Souls* mentions how much the reader liked the characters, how close he (I seldom get fan letters from women) felt to them. Anyone who is going to cross the street to avoid my characters is probably not going to like me much, either. I cannot and will not sanitize or emasculate my characters, or really do anything except stand by them and know that the right people will understand.

And if a reader simply can't find it in his heart to like my characters, so what? There are plenty of other things to appreciate about my work.

CD: A number of writers in the field—Stephen King, Rick Hautala, Charles L. Grant, Peter Straub, Dan Simmons, F. Paul Wilson, the list goes on and on—have set several of their stories in the same locale, as did Faulkner with his Yoknapatawpha County stories. Have you done this yet, or do you plan to in the future?

PZB: Yes, we will be visiting Missing Mile, North Carolina again. My second novel, *Drawing Blood*, is set largely in Missing Mile. It's not a sequel to *Lost Souls* in any way; I'm done with vampires; but it takes place in the same universe. Steve and Ghost from *Lost Souls* are gone on an extended cross-country road trip and tour, but we see more of other characters from the town, like Kinsey Hummingbird, who owns the Sacred Yew nightclub,

and Terry Buckett, who runs the record store.

The main characters, however, are new. *Drawing Blood* is the story of Trevor, an underground comics artist whose dad murdered the rest of their family and committed suicide twenty years ago, leaving only five-year-old Trevor alive. That happens in the prologue. The book's action opens twenty years later with Trevor returning to Missing Mile, to the house where his family died, to try and figure out why he is alive. We also have the convergent story of Zach, a nineteen-year-old computer hacker on the run from New Orleans. Basically, *Drawing Blood* is a haunted house love story.

One of the things I admire most about King's Castle Rock tales is how he developed the history and the social climate of the town over several stories, none of which are sequels, but all of which enhance each other. I'd like to do the same with Missing Mile, only instead of having the sheriff and the town drunk and the lady who runs the sewing store, I'm exploring the freak subculture of the town.

My next book won't be set in Missing Mile, though. I'm taking a break from small-town life.

CD: Many of the characters in your work seem to have trouble saying no to drugs and unprotected sex. Does this reflect your own views on the subjects?

PZB: I prefer to just say, "Thanks!" I adore drugs—some more than others, of course. In *Swamp Foetus*, my short story collection, you may have noticed that the book is dedicated "To the Memory of Alcohol, My Dear Lost Love." I can't drink at all anymore—just used up all my slack before I even turned twenty-one. It's one of the little tragedies of my life.

It is difficult for me to believe that *Cemetery Dance* readers want to

know the sordid details of my sexual history (and even if they *do*, they're not *going to*)! Anyway, I'm hardly going to have a bunch of reckless, devil-may-care fools stop in the middle of a steamy scene and put on condoms just to show how PC I am. My characters don't do much of anything safely; why would they fuck that way?

CD: What's your fan mail like? Do you have any fan horror stories, or have your experiences with your readers been good so far?

PZB: I don't give out my home address to many fans, and I have an unlisted number. But those are normal precautions for anyone in the public eye, as much to maintain my own and my boyfriend's privacy as to protect us from crazed fans. I've received some weird shit in the mail—huge oil paintings, dried blood, human bones, the sonogram of a fetus the writer later aborted—but I like all that.

I answer all my fan mail, of course—at least the first round. The only thing that breaks my heart a little are the fans who write me again and again after I've already written back to them, who want to establish a correspondence. I appreciate their ardor, but if I got into that, I wouldn't have time to write the stories they liked in the first place.

CD: You've garnered some high praise from Harlan Ellison, which isn't lightly given. Has he been a help to you? Have there been any other established pros who've given your career a boost?

PZB: Harlan was a tremendous help to me for years before I even met him, through the excellence and bravery of his work and the sheer balls it obviously required. After we met at I-Con in 1991, he wrote a blurb to help market *Lost Souls* (which Abyss used on the book), recommended me to his

agent, Richard Curtis (who became my agent), invited me to his wonderland of a house when I visited L.A., and gave me all sorts of advice and support. Dan Simmons did many of the same things for me, including a *Lost Souls* blurb. (Richard Curtis is also Dan's agent, and he recommended me at the same time Harlan did after hearing me read my story "Calcutta, Lord of Nerves" at I-Con). Dan was also patient with me throughout a series of escapades illustrating my own immaturity and that of a certain other person who deserves only to remain nameless.

David Silva helped me before anyone else, by publishing my first several stories in *The Horror Show*; obviously, I owe a special thanks to all the editors who have published my work. Ellen Datlow, Terri Windling, Stephen Jones, and Ramsey Campbell have selected several of my stories for Year's Best collections, which provide great exposure. Ed Bryant has written me some wonderful reviews and helped bring me to public atten-



tion also, as have Linda Marotta, Kathryn Ptacek, and Charles de Lint. Tom Monteleone believed in my short stories enough to publish a collection of them (*Swamp Foetus*, Borderlands Press, 1993). Doug Winter contacted me in 1987 after reading my work in *The Horror Show*, asking if I had a novel in the

works; this was the impetus to begin *Lost Souls*. And Brian Hodge, in addition to being a very good friend, brought me to the attention of Jeanne Cavelos at Abyss.

CD: Careers rise so fast in the genre these days; even though you're just getting started, do you see any new writers coming up from the ranks who show promise?

PZB: One of the most promising young writers I know is Christa Faust, age twenty-four. She has just sold her first two stories to *Book of the Dead 3* and *Splatterpunk 2*, and she's working on a novel. Christa has worked as a dominatrix in the S&M scene, and brings a savage new dimension to erotic horror. She's also a brilliant writer. Christa and I are collaborating on a story for *Young Blood*, an anthology of horror stories by writers under thirty edited by Mike Baker.

I've also enjoyed the work of Wilum H. Pugmire, Robert Devereaux, Ian McDowell, Bentley Little, A.R. Morlan, Jeffrey Osier, Yvonne Navarro, Melissa Mia Hall, Jack Hunter Daves, John Edward Ames, Nancy Holder, O'Neil DeNoux, Tom Piccirilli, Philip Nutman, and R. Patrick Gates. Some of these names are better known than others, but all have published amazing work, and I think all will make an impact on their chosen fields.

CD: Do you think that organizations such as the Horror Writers of America can help make things better for writers, or do they just stir up shitstorms like the long-running controversy over practices at Pinnacle and Zebra?

PZB: Let it be known first of all that I am not a member of HWA, that I have never wanted to be a member, that I am simply not interested in joining writers' organizations. I prefer to make my

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contacts in other ways. So everything I have heard about HWA and other such groups is in the realm of hearsay, rumor, and gossip.

That said, I've heard some pretty awful things from people I trust. I have a friend who claims he sold a story to an HWA anthology, then had his story yanked after he criticized HWA in print. I've also heard that if you write a story for one of their anthologies and the editor rejects it, they forbid you from selling it elsewhere. If they're doing shit like that, I have no use for them whatsoever. But I also know some very good, very smart writers who are happy members. Personally, I try to stay away from these tempests in teapots—I think writers can get so caught up in controversies and vendettas that they lose sight of the important part of their job, which is writing

fiction. If I read something that really pisses me off, I might write a letter in response, but I won't get into a letter-writing war. I don't have the time, and I don't need my blood pressure raised, thank you very much.

CD: Have you ever had any experience with writers' workshops? Do you think they benefit or hinder developing talents?

PZB: I attended community "creative writing" classes from time to time as a teenager, few of which did me any good. An exception was the Young Writers'

Workshops I attended at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville in the summers of 1984 and 1985, when I was seventeen and eighteen. These were two-week workshops for teenage writers who had to apply with their work to get in. It was the first time I'd ever been around a large group of smart, weird, creative people my own age who didn't think I was crazy for wanting to write, and it gave me great heart. I wrote my first published story at the 1985 session. I also have two lifelong friends I met at these workshops. *Lost Souls* is dedicated to them, Monica Kendrick and Michael Spencer, both of whom are wonderful writers.

I think this is the main value of most writing classes. Fiction writing, beyond basic language skills and a few tricks, can't be

taught; it's something you either have to do or don't, and if you know in your heart that you must do it, you will probably learn to do it well. But classes and groups can provide the company of other writers, which is an important thing to have. Writing is a solitary act but that doesn't mean you have to work in a vacuum. (Getting back to the last question, I think putting writers in touch with each other is a valuable function of organizations like HWA.)

Reading is the best and ultimately the only real teacher for a writer. That and the life you have to draw upon.

CD: Have you any interest in screenwriting, or doing either adaptations or original stories for comics or radio or other media, or are you content to write for books, magazines and anthologies? Has there been any film interest in your work?

PZB: I don't have much interest in screenwriting, though I'm trying not to close my mind to the idea because the money is so attractive. I have a habit of living beyond my means, and with a million-dollar movie deal I could live even farther beyond them. But I don't think my talents run in that direction especially, and I don't want to take much time away from prose writing just now.

I love underground comics and am very interested in having some of those artists adapt my work. Mary Fleener, who writes and draws the comic *Slutburger Stories*, is doing an adaptation of my story from *Borderlands* 3, "The Sixth Sentinel" (a love story told by the ghost of the pirate Jean Lafitte). I've also talked about some projects with Leslie Sternbergh, Goddess of the East Village. But as long as I trust the artist, I prefer to just give them the story and let them run with it.

Not much interest in writing

original scripts for comics or radio ... again, I don't have the energy to spare from prose.

I've had a couple of nibbles about movie rights to *Lost Souls*, but nothing definite. If it happens, I can only hope for a director who wouldn't shy away from the strong homoerotic elements of my work, maybe someone like Gus Van Sant (*My Own Private Idaho*) or Gregg Araki (*The Living End*).

CD: What are some of the projects you have in the works for the next few months?

PZB: I plan to write some short stories this summer (1993)—they are my first love, and I refuse to abandon them—then begin my next novel in August. It will be a tale of the torrid affair between two serial killers, set mostly (I

think) in New Orleans.

That will complete my original three-book deal with Abyss, and while I have been very happy with them, I will need to take some time off for refill. It's great to have a publisher throwing so much publicity behind my books and eager to have new work from me, but I won't be able to keep writing good stories if I can't go off and get in some trouble first! I'm planning a trip to Asia with my boyfriend, Chris, sometime in the next few years—we will go to, variously and possibly, Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, Thailand, Bali, and India. I am drawn to Calcutta for reasons I cannot explain to anyone's satisfaction (except Dan Simmons, who understands).

CD: Where do you see yourself and/or the genre in ten years?

PZB: The genre is already mutating considerably; with a base of established talent to build on, the influx of new talent (particularly the crazed bitch-goddesses of modern horror) should expand it, twist it, infuse color and depth. There have never been any limits to horror. Conversely, I think there will always be a market for the safe little horror novel, what Craig Spector has called *Horror Lite*, where you know from the very first page (or maybe even from looking at the cover) who will die, who will live, and exactly how the Forces of Good will triumph over Evil. But so what? Let those who want to read 'em, read 'em; just give me the next *Koja* book.

Ten years from now? Horror will be weirder, richer, and more beautiful. And I hope I will be too.

From the author of *Homecoming*.



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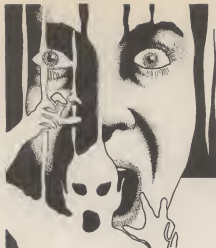
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BERKLEY FEBRUARY 1994



MATTHEW J.
COSTELLO

NIGHTMARE ALLEY

Oh yes, sometimes it's great fun to hear authors gather around the campfire and tell how they came to write such and such a story.

"Well, it was me and the mountain lion, and only one of us would be alive by morning . . ."

Or other unlikely heroic tales of wordsmithery.

But what about the tales that don't get written, and why? How about some ripsnorting yarns about the stories that, for one reason or another, get shelved?

Here are three such stories for your delectation, all of them true, all of them never to see the light of day except here . . . because, well, we're among friends, aren't we?

I was recently asked by a new publication to write a story, the subject matter wide open. The magazine had, in its first issue, published Joe Lansdale, Lynn Hightower, and F. Paul Wilson—so I'd be joining esteemed company.

And I thought I'd use the invitation as an opportunity to dig into my past for a story. The raw material was this . . .

There was a kid in my neighborhood named Duffy. And Duffy was a big guy. In my mind's eye he

was the Godzilla of kids, with his hair cropped close, ready for action.

And Duffy was a bully. Now, I don't know how kids get selected for such roles, but big, smelly, Neanderthal-like Duffy liked nothing better than to torment younger kids.

So, one night me and my friend Simmons ('cause that's how we talked in Brooklyn) were coming home from a movie, a dance, the pizza place . . . I don't know. And crossing each corner was like entering enemy territory. You just kept your head down and hoped that the enemy didn't spot you.

And this particular night we were unlucky enough to be spotted by Duffy, perhaps two full years our senior and, as I said, as big as a house.

And Duffy has us cornered . . . on the corner. Now we could have run, but as any of you who have been bullied know, you always think that — *My God, what if he (it) catches me?! Then I'll really be in for it.*

So you engage the beast in conversation, hoping that you'll escape. The people in Warsaw knew all about it . . .

So Duffy looks from Simmons and then to me. And he says to us

that he wants a blowjob.

Now, I didn't exactly know what a blowjob was. I was a Catholic school kid. My knowledge of sex was based on an illustration by a friend who had a kid sister. He drew a picture of a girl's private parts that resembled a safe deposit box.

(Which, come to think of it, wasn't a bad analogy.)

And Duffy waddles closer to me and reaffirms that he wants the blowjob.

And I'm frozen. I don't even know what it is that Duffy wants, and I know that he may kill me if he doesn't get it.

Which is when Simmons comes to the rescue. He had more street smarts than me, certainly knew more about the world, and he mouths off to Duffy, telling him to leave us alone, distracting the mad bull.

At which point Duffy would either beat us up—or let us go.

And Duffy, probably a coward—like all bullies (or so we were led to believe)—backs off . . . and Simmons and I continue home.

Two codas to the story . . . When I took over the family franchise of the Sunday Newsstand that sat outside the Church, Duffy ended up being my partner (since

another family controlled the other half of the newsstand.) If anything the pig had grown even more slovenly, more of a smelly human.

Needless to say he never talked about that night.

Simmons went onto Vietnam, a one way trip for him . . .

So now—how was this going to be a story? Oh, that part seemed easy, with the story involving someone getting killed by a rock to the head, a road being dug up, and thirty years going by.

That *would* have been the story if I had written it.

But, since I had only one day to write the story, I had to pick something that would be fast, easy . . . not something that would send me rummaging down memory lane, searching for meaning.

So I opted to write a weird tale . . . entertaining . . . light . . . fun . . .

Then there are the fragments, the bits that will never get used.

For example, once my wife told me about a friend of hers, and what happened to their family. It turned out that a dad had taken his daughter onto a roller coaster. And the girl was chewing gum.

And sometime soon after the ride began, maybe on the first great plunge, the gum became stuck in the girl's throat. She signaled her father—who could do nothing, as the coaster continued on its inexorable way.

And it doesn't take much in way of writing skill to help you imagine what that must have felt like. The father and the daughter were trapped.

And when the ride ended, the girl was dead.

And the horror, the pain, the terrible loss must have been overwhelming. But as predatory as a writer can be (and all of us jackals feed off life's experiences, waiting for a juicy morsel), I knew that this

event would never enter my fiction.

It happened as I described it. But I couldn't imagine harnessing it to a piece of fiction.

And finally, one last grim picture, here's another fragment that—for yet another reason—won't find its way into a story.

I come from a family of dedicated alcoholics. My father was an alcoholic, a man who I oft carried into bed on weekend nights, stumbling, his sneezing juices dripping from his red-veined nose (Oh, Aqualung . . .)

And his oldest sons were all alcoholics. One, a man with a childlike sensitivity, seemed to be battered by the vicissitudes of his life and his father's too clever overbearing nature.

And this brother died when his pancreas exploded, leaving behind his own family, and five kids—the oldest eight years old.

Then there was another brother, an ex-marine, ex-cop, ex-fireman—do we see a pattern here?—who ended up at a VA hospital for surgery on his throat. He had cancer, caused by or exacerbated by a life of heavy drinking (we're talking about the 'fifth-a-day' crowd here, folks).

And the day before this brother's operation I called him to wish him well. He spoke to me and seemed eager to keep me on the line. But—I don't know, I had things to do. I cut the call short. After all, I *had* called, hadn't I?

I rushed the call.

But after the operation, Pat couldn't speak. No, it turned out that they opened him up, and then cut down, looking for some end to his cancer. At least, that's what it looked like.

When I went to see him, he was one giant stitch from his neck to his gut. He scribbled words on a pad—no more speaking for him.

He wrote a crazed, childlike scrawl . . . usually senseless, but sometimes making perfect sense.

Like.

Get me out.

I noticed, by the way, that the hospital had posted a seminar for doctors, talking about the exact cancer my brother had, illustrated with photos.

I was left with years to wonder about the level of 'care' my brother received . . . and the last, truncated words I had with him.

Now, I'd like to use this material, all this wonderfully rich pain, this near tragedy. But so far, the moments exist apart for any tale, any theme.

And I've worked sorely to find out what it might all mean—if I had a story to hang it on.

Well, I hope our little party hats aren't all droopy now.

And to make up for the above, I'll leave you with this little story.

Hilary Clinton was touring a hospital when she passed a room and spotted this guy masturbating in full view. Shocked, Hilary asked the doctor, "What is going on here?"

And the doctor explained that, "The poor fellow has an extremely high sperm count and must relieve himself three times a day."

And Hilary continues until she comes to another open room, and there's a patient with a woman performing oral sex on him.

"And what's going on here?" Hilary demanded.

"Oh," the doctor said, "this man has the same problem—but a better medical plan."

(Cue rim shot on the snare drum—and the Committee for Political Correctness apologizes for anyone offended by any of the above . . . for any reason.)

BAIT

RAY GARTON

RAY GARTON is the author of modern horror classics *Live Girls* and *Crucifax Autumn*, and many other popular novels, including his most recent *Dark Channel*. "Bait" is Garton's second short story in the pages of *Cemetery Dance*.

"Go over to the dairy stuff and get a gallon of milk," Mom told them as she stood in the produce section of the Seaside Supermarket, squeezing one avocado after another, looking for ripe ones. "Low-fat, remember."

They knew, both of them: nine year old Cole and his seven year old sister, Janelle. Their mother always ate and drank low-fat or non-fat *everything*. And besides, they knew the brand of milk on sight. The two children headed down the aisle between two long produce display cases.

"And hurry up!" Mom called behind them. "I wanna get out of here so I can have a smoke. Meet me up in the front."

"She's always in a hurry," Janelle said, matter-of-factly.

"Yeah. Usually to have to smoke."

They found the dairy section and went to the refrigerated cases, scanning the shelves of milk cartons, different sizes, different brands. When he spotted the right one, Cole pulled the glass door open, stood on tip-toes, reached up and tilted the carton off the fourth shelf up, nearly dropping it. He let the door swing closed behind him as they started to head for the front of the store to find their mother. But Cole stopped.

"Here's another one," he said quietly.

Janelle stopped, turned back. "Another what?"

"Another one of these kids. On the milk cartons. See?"

He turned the carton so she could see the splotchy, black and white depiction of a little boy's smiling face. It was such a bad picture—as if someone

had run the boy's face through a splotchy, disfunctioning copy machine—that he looked more nightmarish than pitiful. But pity was exactly what the black writing on the carton seemed to be aiming for; Cole read it aloud to Janelle:

HAVE YOU SEEN THIS BOY?

9 YEAR OLD PETER MULRAKES

Last seen in Eureka, CA

in parking lot of Safeway supermarket.

Missing - 1 year, 7 months.

There were a few more details that Cole skipped over, along with a phone number to call if anyone should see the boy or have information regarding his whereabouts. At the very bottom, he read silently, to himself:

A NON-PROFIT COMMUNITY SERVICE
OF VALENCIA DAIRIES, INC.

"Where's Eureka?" Janelle asked.

"Couple hours down the coast from here, I think," Cole replied, staring at the haunting face with its smeared features and splotchy eyes. "I wonder where they go," he muttered to himself, thinking aloud. "I wonder what happens to them when they disappear . . . who takes them away . . . and why."

He turned and went back to the dairy case, opened the door and began turning the other milk cartons around.

"Mom said to hurry," Janelle said. "She wants to smoke."

"In a second."

Each carton had a face on it, some different than others: little boys, little girls, some black, some white and some Asian . . . but all with the same splotchy features and blurred lines that would make the children almost impossible to identify, even if they were

standing right there in front of Cole.

"They have 'em on the grocery bags, too, y'know," Janelle said, in her usual matter-of-fact way.

"Yeah . . . I know."

"What the hell are you two doing?"

Cole spun around, letting the door close again. Their mother stood with her cart, frowning at them.

"C'mon, now, I forgot the fish," she said, waving at them. "Hurry up. I wanna get out of here."

So you can have a smoke, Cole thought.

They went to the seafood counter where, beyond the glass of the display case, Cole and Janelle looked at all the shrimp and scallops, squid and octopus, all kinds of fish, clams, oysters, crabs, lobsters, cel . . .

Like a dead National Geographic special, Cole thought.

Some of the fish were still whole, and their dead, staring eyes looked like glass.

"How did they kill 'em, Cole?" Janelle asked.

He blinked; at first, he thought she was still talking about the faces on the milk cartons, because they were still on his mind. "The fish? They caught 'em in nets or on hooks."

"How?"

"With bait."

"What kinda bait?"

He hated it when she did this. "Sometimes other fish. Y'know, smaller fish than them. Sometimes other things . . . whatever the fish like to eat."

The man behind the counter offered to help Mom, and she said, "I'd like a couple of swordfish steaks, please."

"Sorry, but we're out. Till tomorrow."

A sigh puffed from her lips. "You mean, we live right here on the coast and you're out of swordfish?"

"Fraid so, ma'am."

"Okay, then . . . how about shark?"

"Oh, yeah, got some fresh shark steaks here. How many?"

"Two. And, uh—" She looked down at Cole and Janelle. "What do you guys want for dinner?"

"Not fish," Cole said. "I hate fish."

Janelle added, "So does Daddy. He said so."

"Well, that's just too bad for him. He could stand to lose some weight and red meat is fattening. Besides, it causes cancer. Fish is good for you, so what kind do you want?"

When they wouldn't respond, she ordered some whitefish.

Janelle leaned over and whispered to Cole, "Poor fish. I don't wanna eat 'em if they've been tricked into bein' killed."

Cole looked over the top of the counter to the enormous swordfish on the wall behind it. It was shiny and regal, with its long, needle-like nose jutting into the air. And, of course, it was very dead.

Once they had the fish, they had to walk fast to keep up with Mom on her way up to the register. They stood in line for a while, then when they got up to the counter, they started looking over the racks of candy bars and gum to their right, asking Mom if they could have some.

"No, absolutely not, you know what that stuff does to you?" she hissed, bending toward them. "Just go on outside and wait by the car. I'll be right out."

So, they did. But not before Cole noticed the brown paper bags that were being packed with groceries at each counter.

Smears of faces looked back at him from the sides of the bags as if they were watching him lead his sister out of the store. The faces were haunted . . . and haunting.

On the way to the car, they passed the newspaper vending boxes and Cole stopped when he saw a picture of a little baby on the front page of the local paper with the word **MISSING!** beneath it. The word made him stop. He read the headline, frowning:

2 MONTH OLD BABY STOLEN FROM CRIB
IN MIDDLE OF NIGHT—POLICE HAVE NO SUSPECTS

Cole stared at the baby for a while, frowning, wondering what had happened to it. Who would want to take a little baby? Why?

With a slight burning in his gut, he turned and hurried after his little sister toward the car.

They stood by the car, kicking a smashed aluminum can back and forth between them over the dirty pavement. The nearby ocean gave the chilly, damp breeze a salty smell and seagulls circled overhead, calling out sharply.

The musical voice of a little girl called to them from a few yards away.

"Hey! Wanna see my puppies?"

She stood beside a grey van. The sliding door on the side was half open.

"What kind of puppies?" Cole asked as he and Janelle took a few steps toward her.

"Little bitty ones." She held her palms a little ways apart to demonstrate.

"Let's go see the puppies," Janelle said, smiling.

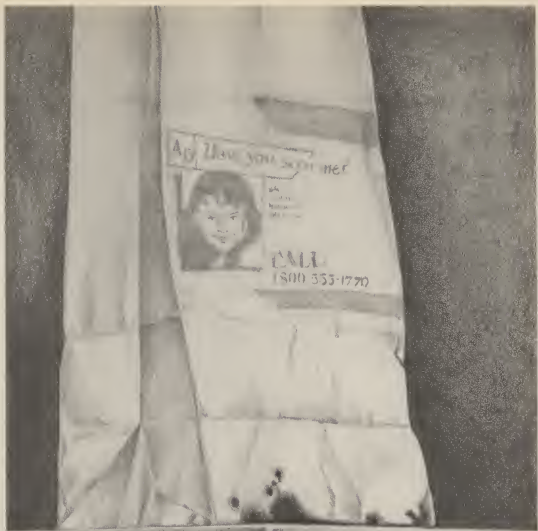
"Okay. But keep an eye out for Mom . . ."

Mom pushed her cart of grocery bags through the automatic door and stopped just outside the store. The door closed behind her with a hum as she fished a Marlboro out of her purse and turned against the wind, leaning her head forward to light up.

It was while she was lighting her cigarette that the grey van drove by.

By the time she lifted her head, taking a deep drag on the cigarette, the van was already gone.

So were the children . . .



♦ ♦

Cole awoke in complete, solid, almost *tangible* darkness.

It was a silent darkness at first because of the loud ringing in his ears and the throbbing in his head. The ringing eventually subsided—slowly, gradually—and was replaced by the cry of a baby.

No, no, the cry of two . . . no, three, maybe four . . . no, *several* babies.

And somewhere nearby there were voices that barely rose above the crying of the babies.

But there was something else . . . something weird . . . something *wrong* . . .

The ground beneath him and the damp, cold darkness all around him was moving . . . tilting back and forth . . . this way, that way, back and forth.

He reached down to feel the surface beneath him, but suddenly realized that he could not move his arms. His wrists were tied together behind him and his ankles were tied together before him.

Then he noticed something else: a low rumble that made its way through the surface beneath him and up into his body, gathering in his chest like quivering indigestion. It sounded like an engine.

Are we on a bus, or something? he thought, then: *We? We?*

"Janelle?" he said, his voice hoarse and weak. "Janelle, you here? C'mon, Janelle, *say* something!"

"Who you talkin' to?" another voice asked. It was the voice of a child, a boy, somewhere around Cole's age.

"What? I'm . . . talking to my sister," Cole said quietly, uncertainly.

"Who?" a little girl asked from somewhere in the darkness—not Janelle—her voice trembling. "Who are you talking to?"

"My sister, Janelle. Janelle? You there? C'mon, Janelle, you *gotta* be there!"

The voices paused for a long moment. Cole could hear the babies crying, some of them gurgling and making spitting sounds, and when he listened very closely, he could hear the breathing of other children . . . some of them were even making purring little snoring sounds . . . and some of them rustled now and then in the dark.

He called for Janelle a few more times, raising his voice in spite of how much it hurt his head, in spite of the way his stomach was beginning to feel sick because of the lurching back-and-forth movements.

Finally, there was a little voice . . . so small and weak and frightened: "Cole? You . . . er you there?"

"Yeah, Munchkin, I'm here. I'm right here."

"Where?"

"I'm here, real close. You hear me?"

"I can't see you."

"Yeah, I know, but you can *hear* me, right?"

"Uh-huh?"

"Good, then that's all that counts right now. We'll see each other soon. You just lay still and don't be afraid, 'cause I'm here."

"Okay. Good. Okay."

Her voice was so small, like a thread being pulled through the darkness by a dull needle.

They were all quiet.

A few of the babies had stopped crying.

The voices outside were more audible now, easier to make out.

"... 'cause these here sharks are damned easy to catch, and 'cause most of the shoppers goin' to their local fish counter in the grocery store are so fuckin' stupid that they . . ."

"... don't know what you're figurin', that they're goin' in to buy shark steaks and they don't know that we're . . ."

There was laughter then, loud, lusty and full of phlegm.

"... you moron, 'cause of what we use 'em for! And 'cause we . . ."

One of the babies wailed for a moment and the voices melted together into a single meaningless sound, and then:

"... go into grocery stores and restaurants as cheap scallops and swordfish steaks and, a-course, shark steaks, so we pick up the money and they can ..."

"... 'at's why that stuff is so cheap in some places, 'cause we're out here . . ."

"... people eating more fish these days to stay healthy and lose weight, so we . . ."

There was another noise behind these voices, a noise that was hard to identify at first although it sounded so familiar, as if it were a sound Cole had heard just yesterday, or the day before.

Then, quite suddenly, he realized it was a sound he heard almost *every* day . . . the ocean.

He was on the ocean! That was why everything was moving back and forth, back and forth!

They were on a boat.

Suddenly, there was a rattling sound and a door burst open, sending blinding light through the darkness. Cole turned his head away and clenched his eyes, squinting.

Heavy footsteps sounded on wood and there was a sharp *Click!* and the room filled with light that was bright enough to ooze through Cole's eyelids and cut into his head like a hot knife.

There was a deep, booming laughter from one man and another barked, "Sec? Here they are! All we need! Lessee, whatta we want here, now, huh? Lessee . . ."

Cole tried to open his eyes. It was hard at first, painful because of the sudden bright light . . . then he

tried opening them gradually, just a little bit at a time. First, he saw only bright light . . . then shapes moving this way and that . . . then the light began to diminish and the shapes began to take more distinct forms . . . features . . . faces . . .

"Well, we'll need a few a-them," one man said, pointing to some shelves with rows of cardboard boxes on them.

The other man, taller, bigger, with broad shoulders and big arms, said, "Yeah, okay, you get them. I'll get these. A couple of 'em. Lessee, lessee, which ones, which ones . . ."

By that time, Cole's vision had cleared enough to see the enormous, bearded man looking down at him.

"You awake, boy?" the man growled through a grin.

"Huh? What?"

The man kicked him, digging the toe of his boot beneath Cole's right knee. Hard.

"Owwwl!" Cole shouted, squinting, trying hard not to cry.

"Yeah, yeah, you're awake all right. You'll do."

The man reached down and slung an arm around Cole's chest, carrying him under his arm like a sack of potatoes so he was staring downward at the moist wooden floor.

"And you!" the man growled, and his voice passed through Cole's entire body. Cole could feel the man picking up another body, another child. Then the man turned and said to his partner, "Go ahead and take four of 'em outta those boxes, just go ahead. We'll need at least that many. 'Fact, we'll prob'ly hafta come back in here and get more."

Cole raised his head and saw all of them, all the children tied up with their backs against the wall or lying on the wood floor. And then he saw Janelle. She looked up and their eyes met.

"Cole!" she shouted, her voice lumpy and dry.

"Don't worry, Munchkin, just stay right there, don't you move, and don't worry about a thing. I'll see you in a little while, okay? Okay?"

With her little mouth hanging open, all she could do was nod.

The man carrying Cole laughed, long and hard . . . and Cole wondered if the man was laughing at what he had said to his sister.

The other children disappeared the moment the door was shut.

And then there was sunlight, brilliant and blinding sunlight, and Cole groaned as he clenched both his teeth and eyes.

Cole was dropped, hit the floor hard and the wind was blown from his lungs. He gasped for breath, thrashed around, straining against the ties on his hands and feet, until he was on his back and staring up at the sky: patches of blue surrounded by dark and

pregnant clouds.

He saw the other man with things under his arms, things wrapped in white cloths . . . things that were wailing, crying, sobbing.

Babies, that's what they were . . . babies.

"Okay, we got 'em," said the man who had carried him out. "They're all here, so let's get to it, you guys!"

Lying on his back and watching them, Cole tried to count them.

There were three . . . no, four men. Or was that guy over there the fifth? He couldn't tell, and quickly didn't care.

And then one of the men lifted a baby high, dangling from his hand. It was wrapped in white cloth. He unwrapped it until it was naked. He handed it to another man, saying, "Remember, the shoulder, that's where it's gotta go."

"I know, I know, whatta you think I am, some kinda amateur?"

The man held the baby roughly in his left hand.

Cole saw the large, barbed hook in his right hand.

The hook went through the baby's shoulder.

Blood spurted and flowed from the wound.

The baby screamed so hard and so long that its face turned red as its arms and legs began to flail and kick.

The hook was attached to a cable and was thrown over the side of the boat with a lot of laughter from all the men.

Cole's eyes were gaping as he stared at them and he suddenly felt as if he might throw up.

A man at the end of the boat holding an enormous fishing pole, like no fishing pole Cole had ever seen before, shouted laughingly, "Oh-ho, well, I guess we'll see what I get here, huh?" Then he burst into laughter, throwing his head back.

Suddenly, one of the men was bending over him, over Cole, lifting him up.

"I'll hold him," he said, "you cut the ropes."

Another of the men, some distance away, suddenly bellowed, "You know, I never thought about it before, but at least this way we'll make the liberals happy 'cause we ain't killin' dolphins, right?"

All the other men, including the one holding Cole, roared with laughter.

Someone cut the ropes and his limbs were free.

Big hands with fat fingers ripped his shirt off and peeled his pants from his legs like the thin seal from a sausage. They pulled his shoes and socks off and tore his underwear away until he was naked and shivering.

"Okay, you take him," the man holding him said. "Tell you what. Give him to Cormy—he knows just how to hook the bigger ones."

Moments later, Cole was looking at a big man with huge moles on his face. He smiled at Cole. "Tell ya what, kid, I ain't gonna hit any of your organs or

arteries, or anything. It'll hurt, but you'll be okay, I promise."

Then the man put a very large hook through Cole's right shoulder. The excruciating pain made him pass out for a little while.

Then he awoke to big hands slapping his face.

"Kid! Hey, kid!" one of the men shouted at him. "You gotta be awake for this, okay? You gotta be awake and kickin'!"

Once Cole was alert and crying out for help—while the other men laughed and mocked him—one of the big men wrapped his thick arms around Cole—sending unbelievable tendrils of pain from his shoulder through his entire body—lifted him, and threw him over the side of the boat and into the water.

Beneath the water, he held his breath, with his cheeks puffed out like little balloons on each side. The pain was still unbearable, but now he was more interested in breathing.

Then he began to thrash and kick.

He found the surface, got his head above it and

cried, "Help me! Please help me help me help me—"

Through bleary, watery eyes, he saw the men looking over the edge of the boat, grinning at him.

"Go get 'em, boy!" one of the men shouted with a laugh in his voice.

He went under again, quite unexpectedly, still kicking and flailing, with his mouth closed and his eyes open. And he saw it.

The shark.

Coming up from the darkness below, aimed directly at him, its predatory, dead-black eyes staring, its teeth showing in its half-open mouth, all of them, rows and rows of sharp, crooked razors.

His own blood clouded the water around him until the silent predator looked like some nightmarish ghost coming closer.

Cole let out his breath, screaming under water as the shark came closer and closer . . .

. . . closer and closer . . .

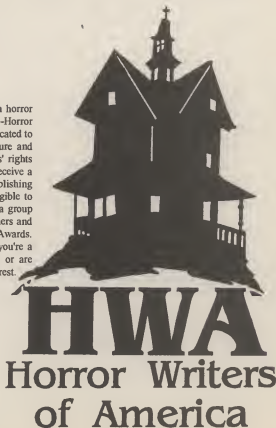
— CD

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NEEDFUL KINGS & OTHER THINGS

Stephen King's new short story collection, *Nightmares and Dreamscapes*, is sure to delight fans who have been clamoring for years to read some obscure story which was previously available only in a hard-to-find magazine or a pricey, limited edition. And even for those who have read all the reprinted stories, there are a few surprises, including a number of new pieces, such as "Umney's Last Case," "The Ten O'Clock People," and "The House On Maple Street."

Nor is this the only trick up King's sleeve. Many of the stories have been rewritten for this edition, some just to add a contemporary reference or two to bring them up to date, while others have undergone a more dramatic transformation. The most significant change is in "It Grows on You," which originally appeared in the Fall 1973 issue of *Marshroots*.

The story has been extensively overhauled to make it a part of the Castle Rock series, set after the events of *Needful Things*. The locale has been moved from Gates Falls to Castle Rock, but most of the story's characters and its authentic Maine ambience remain intact, although a climatic and beautifully erotic image has been rendered far more blatantly sexual, and I'm not certain yet that that's necessarily a good thing.

In his introduction, King states that this collection contains all of his previously-unpublished work which he considers worthy of inclusion. This unfortunately means that a significant block of material will not be collected, including such well-known pieces as "The Grate," "Weeds," "The Blue Air Compressor" and "Night of the Tiger." Information on these and other uncollected stories can be found in my *The Unseen King*, which is currently available from Borgo Press and should be extensively revised in the next couple of years under the working title *The Unseen King Revisited*, to delete the stories published in this collection.

On the plus side, however, the majority of King's readers will finally get to see such legendary King tales as "Dolan's Cadillac" and "My Pretty Pony," also revised for this edition, along with the new pieces mentioned above, and the rare King baseball poem "Brooklyn August." In addition, the collection includes such oddities as a rare King script, "Sorry, Right Number," as well as the non-fiction Little League piece, "Head Down," which appeared in *The New Yorker* a few years back.

This is a "must-have" volume for any King fan, and takes readers down a few twists and turns not usually found on his literary path.

The journey should make for interesting reading, though.

The collection is also available in an unabridged audio edition from Penguin-HighBridge Audio, released in a series of three eight-cassette volumes, the first of which appeared simultaneously with the bound volume. The stories will be read by a group of celebrity readers, including (in Volume One): Stephen King ("Introduction" and "Head Down"); Tabitha King ("The House On Maple Street"); *Spenser* author Robert B. Parker ("Umney's Last Case"); Whoopi Goldberg ("Suffer the Little Children"); Tim Curry ("Crouch End"); Eve Beglarian, Yeadley Smith, the voice of Lisa Simpson and a performer in *Maximum Overdrive* ("Rainy Season"); Rob Lowe ("Dolan's Cadillac"); and Stephen Jay Gould ("Brooklyn August").

Future readers are still being selected, but the second volume is set, and here's an exclusive look at the lineup: Kathy Bates ("Chattering Teeth"); Lindsey Crouse ("Dedication"); David Cronenberg ("Sneakers"); Tim Curry ("The Doctor's Case"); Matthew Broderick ("The End of the Whole Mess"); Stephen King ("Home Delivery"); and reading "My Pretty Pony" is Grateful Dead guitarist, Jerry Garcia.

The entire book will be presented unabridged in the three vol-

umes, each retailing for \$30.00. Volume two will ship in March 1994, and the final volume is due the following July.

On September 19, King and Viking made history by offering "Umney's Last Case" as the first electronic serial publication of a literary work on the Online Bookstore, allowing computer users to search, browse, read, or download the story on their home PCs, all for a modest \$5 fee. To take part in this historic event, access the bookstore on Internet at PL014@mail.psi.net or by phone at 508-546-7346. Tell 'em you read it here first—even if you didn't (hahal).

As long as we're on the subject, here's a King goodie that slipped right past me a few months back. Back in the Spring, Penguin-HighBridge released a three-hour abridged audio adaptation of Tabitha King's *One On One*. The reader? Stephen King!

Although it suffers somewhat from condensation, as do most novels, this is still a fabulously powerful piece of work. And at \$16.00, it's a bargain.

In other news, Laurel's production of *The Stand* is in post-production; in fact, Executive Producer King was set to look at a rough cut in New York recently. We'll have more on this as things develop.

The film version of "Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption" is currently being filmed at the Ohio State Reformatory, which closed three years ago. Based on King's original novella from *Different Seasons*, the movie stars headliners Morgan Freeman and Tim Robbins, and is directed by Frank Darabont (the producer of "The Woman in the Room's" short film version from some years ago).

King took part in the second gathering of the Rock Bottom Remainders, the literary rock band, as they embarked on their first tour back in the summer. Although it's uncertain whether there will be an accompanying video this time, the tour went well, and a book is planned, with each author/musician contributing his views on the experience. The working title is *Mid-Life Confidential*.

King appeared on NBC's *To-day* show on October 18 to promote the new collection, and followed that with an appearance

that the singer has very specific ideas about what he wants to do, and has not yet approved King's concept.

The next King novel, *Insomnia*, is at the publisher, and will presumably appear sometime in 1994. More details to follow next issue. And the only word on *The Dark Tower IV: Wizard And Glass* is that King has not yet set pen to paper, but has collected an extensive body of riddles for use in the project.

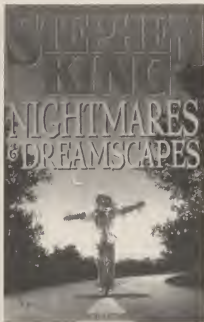
King spent this past summer working on *The Stand* in Utah, coaching Little League in Maine, and trying to get in some R 'n' R.

Before I close the King news, here's one last tidbit: Back in August, I was in Bangor, Maine, and stopped in at Bett's Bookstore downtown (see their advertisement elsewhere in this issue). Put succinctly, the place is "King Central" and they have a few items which are available nowhere else.

Mainly, there are a pair of gold-plated 3-D Christmas ornaments, the first two issues in a series of Bangor landmarks. The first, in perilously short supply, is the Thomas Hill Standpipe, which figured prominently in *IT*. It's available for \$19.95. The second one features the Italianate villa

at 47 West Broadway (King's home), complete with fence and spider-web gate, available for \$23.95. Both of these are collector's items and must be seen to be believed!

One-time King collaborator Peter Straub brought out his first new novel in some time earlier this year. *The Throat* is one of his finest to date, a complex, ever-surprising mystery which takes everything which has gone before in Straub's



in Washington D.C., to address the National Press Club on October 19.

One last item from this past summer: An interesting King item was reported in the July 23 issue of *Entertainment Weekly* (No. 180). It seems that Michael Jackson has approached King about scripting a long-form video for a song Jackson is writing for the upcoming Paramount film, *Addams Family Values*. King has begun working on the project, but King's office reports

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Also available one bound set of the Maine Campus Newspaper with the infamous "King's Garbage Truck" and the "Study, Dammit!" poster!

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ongoing "Blue Rose" cycle of novels and short stories and turns it on its ear.

Elements and characters from *Koko* and *Mystery* are brought together as the secret of the Blue Rose murders is finally unraveled—or is it? It's really hard to tell in this amazing novel, which seems to resolve itself several times throughout its massive length, then abruptly takes off on a new tangent which is equally plausible. And since Straub has been exploring this path for years now, who's to say he's done yet?

One motif which runs throughout the novel is Tim Underhill's love for jazz, and the novel, indeed the entire "Blue Rose" cycle, is very much the literary equivalent of jazz. Straub lays down the basic mystery, a simple whodunit, and then begins expanding and improvising, moving farther and farther away from it,

across time and space, to Vietnam and far northern resort towns, with new suspects and likely killers arising and being confirmed, only to be discarded as the next tack is taken and new themes reworked from the old ones.

All of this is done in grand style, with plenty of excitement, suspense and gruesome thrills delivered along the way to keep readers following the tangled thread to the very end. This is easily the best time I have had with one of Straub's novels, and it comes highly recommended. If you haven't experienced the book yet, and are looking for a back to school read, then take my advice—go for *The Throat*.

Dean Koontz's newest novel, *Mr. Murder*, his last for Putnam, will be appearing in October. It's the story of Marty Stillwater, a successful writer who is forced to take

his family on the run when a mysterious, implacable man appears in his house one stormy day and proclaims himself to be the real Marty and Marty to be a man who has stolen his life, his wife, and his children. Making matters even more intriguing is the fact that this man looks and talks exactly like Marty.

Over the next two days, Marty and his family attempt without success to elude their unbeatable foe, who is himself being hunted by a pair of mysterious men with orders to retrieve him and to kill anyone who knows about him. All of this reaches its climax in a violent, suspenseful confrontation in a snowstorm, one of the best Koontz has ever written.

This is a theme which seems to combine elements of two recent Stephen King works, the novel *The Dark Half* and the novella "Secret Window, Secret Garden." Of

course, Koontz manages to take his own unique approach to the situation, resulting in a novel which can stand on its own among those earlier works. All the trademark elements of characterization, suspense and action are solidly in place, coupled with a surprisingly positive message given the despair of the world view informing the novel. Koontz once again delivers a gripping entertaining winner.

As usual, the novel will also be released as a deluxe limited edition from Putnam, slipcased and illustrated as always by Phil Parks. Koontz is also working on his first novel for Alfred A. Knopf, and hopes to continue producing limited editions of those new books as well. And, as if he didn't already have enough to do, Koontz reports that Ballantine will be releasing the first of a series of reprints of his early science fiction paperbacks, *Invasion*, very soon as well.

You may recall the furor over *Invasion* a few years back in the pages of *Castle Rock*, when a number of King fans thought the novel was written by King under a pseudonym, due to its Maine locale and alien-invasion theme. Oddly enough, in revising the novel for this new edition, Koontz has removed it from its Maine locations and added nearly 100,000 additional words! Readers of the original, he reports, will find the new version almost a completely new experience.

Dean also mentioned that he foresees making similar revisions to the rest of his early work as it is released over the next few years.

In the meantime, readers can enjoy the absolutely gorgeous limited edition of Koontz's novel *Beastchild*, available now from Charnel House. The novel takes place in a future world where the Earth has been conquered by the naoli, a race of repulsive invaders. Hulann, a naoli, is feeling doubts about the justice of his people's cause, and when those doubts lead

him to spare the life of a young human boy he encounters, he finds himself and the boy on the run from his own people, tracked by a Hunter, a specialized naoli bred specifically to hunt down and destroy its prey.

The chase leads across the country, and along the way the pair encounter all manner of naoli weapons designed to stop them, not the least of which is a mammoth living protoplasm entity which can shape-shift to chase and trap them.

Koontz did not revise this novel for its new publication, but provides an introduction by which he attempts to place it in perspective with his newer work. It doesn't take a detailed reading to see that the basically optimistic tone which is to be found in even the darkest of Koontz's novels is present here—indeed, despite its basically downbeat ending, the element is so strong as to seem almost idealistic.

Beastchild is available in two formats. The regular limited edition is bound in a shimmering green cloth, in a slipcase covered in a beige Iris cloth. There is also a lettered edition, bound in lizard skin. Both are signed by Koontz and artist Pamela Lee, who designed the cover icon and provides four full-color illustrations. Either volume will be a compliment to any Koontz fan's library, and is the only edition of the novel currently in print. Contact Charnel House for price and availability.

Anyone with more than a casual interest in horror will have more than passing interest in Robert Bloch's self-styled "unauthorized autobiography," *Once Around The Bloch*, new in hardcover from Tor. Profusely illustrated with photos from throughout the author's life, the book traces Bloch from his early days in Chicago and its suburbs through the beginnings of his correspondence with H.P. Lovecraft, and his own writing ca-

reer.

Bloch doesn't take himself seriously in the book, which is laced throughout with tongue-in-cheek one-liners, atrociously delightful puns, and gracious, self-deprecating humor. Nor does he do much to enhance his reputation as "the Author of *Psycho*"—the novel and subsequent film are dealt with in a single chapter, while five or six are devoted to an early campaign Bloch headed for a successful mayoral race in Milwaukee.

Robert Bloch's career has taken him through the worlds of politics, advertising, literature, film and television, and a truly amazing number of luminaries in all of these fields make appearances in these pages. It illustrates better than anything I have ever read the entire writing gives one to the movers and shakers in our society.

All in all, fans of Bloch's work or those who simply wish to see how a good autobiography should be written should pick up this book and walk once around the Bloch. It'll be well worth the trip.

Mary, Mary is Ed McBain's tenth novel about Matthew Hope, the crusading Florida-based defense attorney who never takes a case unless he believes his client is innocent. But this time, he may have bitten off more than he can chew as he is called upon to defend Mary Barton, a reclusive former teacher accused of kidnapping and murdering three young girls and burying their mutilated bodies in her ornate backyard garden.

Unlike its predecessor, *Three Blind Mice*, the bulk of this novel takes place in court, and McBain does an excellent job of describing what it feels like to be a defense attorney sitting there watching your client's case go down the tubes. Having sat in that chair many a time myself, I can say with some authority that he's nailed the feeling.

Readers who are only familiar with McBain through his 87th Precinct novels, or those who enjoy the newly-created legal thriller genre, should find much to enjoy in *Mary, Mary*. One caveat, though—McBain is habit-forming.

In *L.A. Times*, Stuart Woods tries something that's generally hard to do—writing a novel whose main character is an unrepentant prick and yet trying to keep the reader interested in what happens to him. And although he doesn't entirely succeed, the result is a taut thriller set in the world of Hollywood filmmaking.

The main character is Michael Vincent, a small-time New York hood who lives for the movies. While attending film school, he produces an award-winning film which gives him entree to a major Hollywood studio. Once there, he begins a meteoric rise to the top of the film elite, using the same tactics which stood him in good stead with the mob—murder and intimidation.

Of course, eventually, this ride must come to an end, and waiting for it is part of what keeps readers going in this novel. Some of the rest is just watching all of the various villains in this novel—and with villains this villainous, who needs heroes?—try their best to outfox each other. There is plenty of action, suspense and mayhem, enough to keep pages turning from the start to the abrupt, twist ending. Although not nearly so good as most of his prior novels, Woods has made a good stab at handling a difficult type of novel, and it's still fun to read.

Take one isolated country diner, add a handful of disparate characters from varied strata of society, mix liberally in a dark night and a furious, isolating blizzard, garnish with one shotgun-toting mystery man in black lurking outside in the shadows, and you have

Raven, Charles Grant's (apparently, he's also suffering from Dean Koontz's Disease, symptomized by the abrupt loss of one's middle initial) new hardcover thriller from Tor.

Grant delivers a taut exercise in suspense wherein the crew and customers of McLaren's Diner, an isolated New Jersey eatery, find themselves trapped by a snowstorm and a menacing figure who stands outside and shoots the first man who tries to leave. For the next 250-plus pages, the uninterrupted narrative builds the brand of quiet suspense for which Grant has long been famous.

This is the kind of exercise writers love—sticking their characters in a tight spot in a constricted location and letting the story work its magic, and Grant is clearly having a good time here. You will too, if you give *Raven* a try.

There are a couple of anthologies making the rounds right now which are worth your while to check out. The first is *After the Darkness*, a new volume from Maclay edited by Stanley Wiater. As was the case with Wiater's *Night Visions* volume, the book features "after-words" by the editor introducing the writers, with a short quotation from each contributor about his or her story.

And fine stories they are, too. Between the superbly-designed covers of this handsome book are such gems as: "Breakfast at Earl's," Rick Hautala's zany, blackly humorous look at roadhouse cuisine during hunting season in Maine; Les Daniels' "The Little Green Ones" and Gahan Wilson's "The Marble Boy," two very different looks at cemetery sculpture; Graham Masterton's chilling "Making Belinda," which examines sculpture of a different kind with a nice "Monkey's Paw" twist; and one of my favorites, Chet Williamson's "Perfect Days," one of the most unique serial-killer tales you're

likely to read in a month of Sundays.

These are just a few highlights of a truly outstanding anthology, including short stories from Phil Nutman, Nancy Holder, Tom Monteleone, Gary Brandner, J.N. Williamson, Gary Raisor, Thomas Tessier, and many more. Contact Maclay & Associates at P.O. Box 16253, Baltimore, MD 21210, and get a copy.

And when you do, ask them about John Maclay's own new books, both his new short-story collection *Mindwarps*, a slim volume featuring some of the finest short-short fiction you'll encounter this side of Richard Christian Matheson, and his forthcoming anthology, *Voices From the Night*. The latter features fine short fiction from the likes of Tom Monteleone, Rick Hautala, J.N. Williamson, Alan Rodgers, Amy Stout, Stanley Wiater, our own Rich Chizmar, myself, and many more. Look for that one in the fall, and watch these pages for price and ordering info.

T. Lucien Wright's new novel, *Dark Visions*, is just out from Pinnacle. Amelia Fortunato is a young college student from Rochester who has psychic abilities. When she sees ghosts in a Buffalo parking lot reenacting their deaths in a hotel fire which took place on the spot years before, and when her abilities lead police to the killer, her troubles are only beginning.

Freed on one of those technicalities you hear so much about, the murderer, Freeman Ridge, begins stalking Amelia along the shores of the Great Lakes, trying to silence her forever. The result is a novel which moves away from the Upstate vampires of Wright's previous three novels, and shows him to be equally adept at crafting other types of thrillers as well. This guy's one to watch folks, and I'm telling you first!





DOUGLAS E. WINTER

NIGHT LETTERS

After his triumphant *Ghost Story* (1979) and several equally powerful successors, Peter Straub turned from the realm of supernatural horror to create the unique psychological thrillers *Koko* (1988) and *Mystery* (1990). With *The Throat* (Dutton, hardcover, \$24.00), he concludes a loose trilogy with a fiction of remarkable transcendence: Not a war novel, though its scenes of men in combat are deft and intense; not a mystery, though crime and detection are its substance; and certainly not a horror novel, at least in the traditional sense. It is instead a masterpiece of concealment and revelation, the most intelligent novel of suspense to come along in years.

Straub's Marlow, Timothy Underhill, the haunted Vietnam veteran-turned-novelist who claims to have cowritten *Koko* and *Mystery*, is summoned back to his home town of Millhaven, Illinois, by John Ransom, a childhood chum last seen in Vietnam, worm-eaten by war, now reincarnated as a thick-waisted, balding professor of religion. Ransom's wife, April, has been brutally assaulted, another person killed, and above their broken bodies are found two frightening words: "Blue Rose."

Millhaven is Straub's native Milwaukee gone south, less city than a fading relic of youth, a scrapbook whose dusty pages are for the

most part vacant, then fall open suddenly to immaculate, inescapable images: "The strongest, least digested parts of your experience can rise up and put you back where you were when they occurred; all the rest of you stands back and weeps." These are the *genius loci*, the unforgotten, unforgiven landmarks of Underhill's despair: the ramshackle St. Alwyn Hotel, where his hard-drinking father worked; the arched tunnel behind St. Alwyn where he last saw his little sister—another April—before death claimed her; and the Beldame Oriental Theatre, where, drawn by the light of the motion picture screen, Underhill first touched the darkness.

Forty years ago, when these places and Underhill were young, Millhaven was haunted by a mad killer who inked the words "Blue Rose" above his prey. Now the killing has resumed—or perhaps it has never stopped—and Underhill, whose best-known novel sought to exorcise the first murders, finds himself a character in a revisionist sequel. Through a lavish and labyrinthine plot, Straub crafts cunning and ever-evolving tension, not by page-turning props but by nervous concatenation.

Everyone is suspect; in Millhaven, as in Vietnam—and, indeed, in life—no one is innocent. Blood stains the hands of most every char-

acter, from Underhill and Ransom, who killed in battle, to those who killed in passion and pain and self-defense, and finally to the most garish and devoted of murderers: Walter Dragonette, the "Meat Man," an agonized amalgam of Jeffrey Dahmer and John Wayne Gacy whose body count may include April Ransom; and Major Franklin Bachelor, Straub's Mr. Kurtz, lost in a Vietnamese heart of darkness—a true unknown soldier, "the ghost that haunts us when our principles are laid aside."

With his private army of Montagnard tribesmen, Bachelor fought his version of the good fight in Darlac Province and beyond, loosed of such frivolous boundaries as north and south, friend and foe, surrendering idealism to utter savagery. Ransom's mission, twenty years ago, was to find Bachelor and bring him out of the jungle; Underhill's mission now, it would seem, is to find him and take him back.

For Bachelor, as for Underhill and Ransom, the dark descent began not in Southeast Asia, but in a more private and ancient place: "Veterans of Millhaven don't have meetings," Underhill tells us. The other Vietnam—"the Vietnam before Vietnam, of childhood" tainted each of them; the jungle taught them only that death does not hide in the shadows. When

Underhill last saw Ransom at Camp Crandall, a necklace of dried and blackened tongues circling his neck, Ransom pronounced their certain knowledge: "A seed of death is at the center of every moment."

It is that seed that blossoms as the Blue Rose. The garden of evil called Millhaven is ripe for harvest — alcoholism, child abuse, infidelity, racial strife, madness and, above all, murder are its stony soil; and, Straub, through Underhill, constructs a glorious parable: "the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest" (*Romans* 16: 25-26). Millhaven and Vietnam are "oddly interchangeable, fragments of some greater whole, some larger story — a lost story that preceded the fables of Orpheus and Lot's wife and said, *You will lose everything if you turn around and look back.* You turn around, you look back. Are you

destroyed? Or is it that you see the missing, unifying section of the puzzle, the secret, filled with archaic and godlike terror, you have kept from yourself?"

The throat, George Bataille observed, is the place of the sacrificial cut, the opening through which we touch our god. For Underhill, fighting for sobriety and sanity, the ever-spilling blood of Millhaven opens the throat of his novel, down which he pours himself in desperation, unaware that he is writing his own Book of Revelations, the key to the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is no novelistic convenience that Underhill is a writer of fiction; it is through his telling and transcribing of stories that the senseless violence at last brings sense to the task of surviving ourselves. *The Throat*, like its Ur-text, *Heart of Darkness*, is a layering of narratives, a constant unveiling of mysteries — not only the vivid facts of the stories Underhill tells and is told, but the evasive truth behind them — from enigma to *aletheia*.

Those who read with an agenda in hand may seize upon the dearth of female characters, save as victims; or the calm with which Straub recounts the atrocities of war and peace. But this is a novel of men in war and, more important, men *at* war with the very things that define them, mold them, cast them as creatures capable of killing. And it is a novel of conscience that confronts the hidden horrors of our dreams and imagination — that undeniable attraction to the unspeakable, the underground existence in each of us.

Peter Straub has gathered the stuff of popular myth and entertainment into a moral exegesis, a search for that moment of seeing *through* our world. He tells us, and so very convincingly, that the place where we touch our god is indeed a wound: We live each day with the awesome paradox of seeing the

light only because of the darkness.

The Throat is beautiful; it is terrifying; it is brilliant.

★ ★

Among the Dead. By Michael Tolkien (Morrow, hardcover, \$20.00). Although published, promoted and reviewed as mainstream sociodrama, this second novel by the acclaimed writer of *The Player* (and writer/director of "The Rapture") is horrific black comedy of the highest order. Its pathetic antihero, Frank Gale, manages a bitter existence into an ever-escalating nightmare: Tired of a deadend dalliance with another woman, he surprises his wife and daughter with a vacation to Acapulco, where he hopes that a painstakingly crafted letter of expiation will put things to right. But when he lingers in bidding farewell to his mistress, he misses the flight, and his wife and daughter board without him. When their airplane crashes, the lies that are his life become sudden truths among the dead. This is an irresistible indulgence of bleak irony and mad laughter, and a novel and novelist whom readers of horror should eagerly embrace as one of their own.

★ ★

The Nihilisthete. By Richard Kalich (Compac Reader, mini-paperback, \$1.49). Observant visitors to the bookracks of 7-Elevens, bus stations, and less welcome venues may have noticed a recent run of mini-paperbacks, truly pocket books of postcard size, checking in at less than 150 pages. Although most are mall-maven eyecandy, devoted to astral signs, PMS and weight loss plans, dare to look, and do so long and hard, for the ghastly black-framed cover of *The Nihilisthete*, a truly twisted novel that defies most any description save sick, sick, sick. Buy this book. Read this



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book. And remember: You heard it here first.

★ ★

The Southern Baptist Convention and Freemasonry. By James L. Holly, M.D. (Mission & Ministry to Men, 550 N. 10th Street, Beaumont, TX 77702, chapbook, \$2.00) Merely one of a series devoted to the debunking of "mystery religions," this scholarly tract explains in some loving detail Why Freemasonry Is Not Compatible With Faith In Jesus Christ. Also answered are such essential questions as: Who is in the coffin in the Thirtieth Degree? Who is this god, EN SOPH? And: How can Christians be so duped? Those not previously aware of this spiritually devastating and unGodly brotherhood of Satanic darkness (the Freemasons, not the Southern Baptists) need look no further than these pages for wisdom most divine.

★ ★

Obsession: The Films of Jess Franco. By Lucas Balbo, Peter Blumenstock and Christian Kessler; additional material by Tim Lucas (Graf Haufen & Frank Trebbin, c/o Video Watchdog, P.O. Box 5283, Cincinnati, OH 45205-0283, hardcover, \$50.00). Words cannot begin to describe the cinema of Jess Franco, the prolific Spanish director whose most well-known films — *Gritos en la Noche* ("The Awful Dr. Orloff") (1961) and *Necronomicon* ("Succubus") (1967), among many, many more — blurred the imagery and bounds of horror and erotica. These are films that, for better or worse (and too often, I'm afraid, it's the latter), must be experienced to be believed. *Obsession* is a lovingly assembled retrospective about this master of guilty pleasures, its centerpiece a filmography covering his more than 150 motion pictures, with supplementary articles, interviews and page after page of provocative stills and poster art.

It proves one of the most ambitious, and best, books ever produced about a director of horror films — or for that matter, about any director.

★ ★

The Illustrated Dinosaur Movie Guide. By Stephen Jones (Titan, trade paperback, \$21.95). Despite its commercial veneer — this book probably would not exist without this summer's release of "Jurassic Park" — the latest installment of Stephen Jones's series of "illustrated movie guides" is a delightful, though pricey, stroll down monster lane. With an introduction by Ray Harryhausen and a substantial collection of photographs, many of them in color, this is a chronological filmography of most every motion picture and television program that even vaguely evoked our reptilian ancestors (which means, curiously enough, most every "great ape" movie and, in Jones's words, "the occasional blob . . . and mutants created by the vagaries of nature or the accidents of science"). Although long on titles, the guide is sadly short on details, devoting but short paragraphs (and often, only single sentences) to the films in review. Unlike many of the film guide set, however, Jones is both a meticulous researcher and a devotee; his enthusiasm is apparent on every page, making *The Illustrated Dinosaur Movie Guide* a delight for the hardcore horror fan and the casual viewer alike.

★ ★

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Hammer Horror. By Warfare (Silva Screen, compact disc, \$15.95). This concept album by British progressive/metal band Warfare (led by vocalist/drummer Evo and featuring guitarist Algy Ward of The Damned) is a rock tribute to "The Studio That Dripped Blood" Hammer Films. Replete with synthesized atmospherics and sampled dialogue from Hammer's most memorable films, *Hammer Horror* is something akin to an Iron Maiden version of "Rocky Horror": Powerchord guitar anthems complete with gloomy keyboard excursions and overripe lyrics to create a faux-gothic opera that far exceeds the sum of its parts. Great listening for writing or reading, and most likely to be found in the "soundtracks" bins of local record stores.

★ ★

Next issue:
Dario Argento's *Trauma*.

SLIPPIN' INTO DARKNESS

A NOVEL EXCERPT BY NORMAN PARTRIDGE

CHAPTER ONE: 12:03 A.M.

There's the windup, and here's the pitch: a beer bottle flew through the night air and exploded against a granite cross. Shards of broken glass knifed the soft earth. Warm liquor rained down on clipped blades of cemetery grass, shivered, and formed fat tears.

The pitcher stood on the mounded grave of an insurance salesman who had expired in 1992, exactly sixty feet, six inches from the granite cross. He smiled, appreciating his skill. Half in the bag, but he was still putting them over straight and hard with a strong arm. Dead solid strikes, one after another, each bottle shattering against the center of the granite crosspiece . . . the cold hard strike zone.

Graveyard baseball was the name of the game. No men on base. Rounded mounds for first, second, and third; the graves of a telephone solicitor, a war hero, and an infant born without a brain. Not exactly a million-dollar infield, but the infield didn't matter when the pitches were flying straight and true. Every bottle right on target. A cancer-serious no-hitter.

The pitcher sighed, concentrating on the cross. He was alone. No men anywhere, but that was to be expected. This was a pitcher's game, a hurler's mid-night solitaire. Graveyard baseball was a game that disallowed self-deception and required a certain amount of imagination. After all, a granite cross couldn't really swing a bat, so imagination was truly a necessity.

Unless the pitches were flying straight and true. Unless the bases remained empty, as they were now. Then the game didn't require any imagination at all.

Sweat beaded on the pitcher's forehead, soaking the band of a Hogan Spartans baseball cap that had spent eighteen years lost in one closet or another. His arm would ache like hell tomorrow. Eighteen years had passed since he had last held a beer bottle in his hand and faced an implacable granite batter. But tomorrow's pain didn't matter. Tomorrow didn't mat-

ter at all, because tonight it was April, and it was opening day, and the pitcher's mind was deep in the pit of memory.

Memories that had brought him to this place.

Memories of a girl.

The pitcher opened another bottle—the dry hiss of released pressure was as cold as the stunted stone forest that surrounded him—and he drank deeply.

The windup. The pitch.

The crackle of exploding glass. The smell of beer and a distant ocean breeze and an unseasonably warm April night and clipped cemetery grass.

A gentle rain of alcohol brewed from pure Rocky Mountain spring water.

A wet granite cross reflecting the gleam of the moon.

APRIL LOUISE DESTINO

APRIL 1, 1958 - APRIL 1, 1994

I'LL SEE YOU IN YOUR DREAMS

April Destino had brought the pitcher here tonight. She was dead, and he was one of her boys. He wasn't one of the boys of summer, even though he wore a baseball glove. No, he was one of the boys of April.

Toeing the mound, the pitcher imagined carrion worms doing their work on the dead insurance man six feet beneath his battered cleats. He slammed another bottle into the webbing of his glove. A puff of dust rose from cracked leather.

He twisted off the cap and drank.

The windup.

A flashlight beam cut at the pitcher's eyes. He turned away quickly, as if acid had been flung at his face, but the tattered bill of his baseball cap couldn't protect him from the unyielding glare.

The pitch.

The sight: the flashlight beam too bright, too strong, somehow able to pull the bottle off course so

that it sailed low and outside under the left arm of the cross that bore April's name. The sound: bottle skidding over grass; brewed Rocky Mountain spring water sloshing, spattering alcohol tears.

"Hey! What the hell do you think you're doing?"

The pitcher didn't answer. The flashlight beam was dry ice on his face, and his eyes burned and his pupils shut down to nothing, and then his eyes screamed.

A muscle twitched in the pitcher's neck. He started to get a little angry. He bit his lower lip, and then his tongue went to his upper lip and licked at a trickle of sweat.

"Goddammit! You can't sneak into the cemetery in the middle of the night and do this shit! You're in trouble, asshole. Big trouble!"

The shouting man was close now. Short and fat and staring up from under the pitcher's chin, his little fatman voice too loud and incredibly self-righteous.

The man was an umpire ready to argue balls and strikes.

The pitcher didn't say a word.

The umpire bumped his chest against the pitcher's.

The windup . . . but this time the pitcher's hand was empty and balled into a fist.

The pitch: knuckles cracked against the umpire's jaw, and he shut up, and he fell down.

The pitcher turned off the man's flashlight and welcomed the darkness. In a moment his eyes adjusted, and he picked up the thing he had brought with him in place of a bat. He stood over the umpire, not looking down, looking instead at the playing field, the mounded bases, the baselines that were nothing but fugitive shards of moonlight. A marble Christ waved at him from center field, daring him. It was an unseasonably warm April evening, but in the pitcher's mind it was an April afternoon and the ghost of a morning fog born on Pacific tides could still be tasted in the air.

A thousand echoes of a thousand lives haunted this place. Crashing waves washed the silence. Fog-horns sang baritone and time-clocks clicked a staccato rhythm and a shipyard quitting whistle played sharp counterpoint. Blue-collar fathers shouted encouragement to boys in dirty uniforms. Worn cleats bit into dusty earth.

And then came the single echo the pitcher wanted to hear: the musical voice of a cheerleader begging him to put one over the fence.

It was not a bat that he held in his big hands, but in his mind he imagined that it was.

The crack of the bat. He wanted to hear it.

The roar of the crowd. He could hear it still.

April was here, asleep in the ground.

And it was opening day.

CHAPTER TWO: 1:12 A.M.

Marvis Hanks, Junior, climbed the stairs that led from the basement to the foyer of his house. His long fingers were interlocked so that his hands made a shelf at crotch level; a stack of videotapes was scissored between his hands and the point of his chin, and consequently his eyes were trained on the ceiling instead of the stairs. Normally Marvis would have eschewed such daredevil activity, but he had been climbing these stairs for thirty-four of his thirty-five years. Each step was completely familiar.

He breathed a short sigh of relief as he left the staircase. The heels of his expensive Bally loafers clacked smartly against the white pine floor in the foyer. Marvis had lived alone since the deaths of his parents, both of whom had succumbed while he was in college, so the whisper of his sigh and the tapping of his heels were the only sounds in the house.

The only sounds, until he passed the living room.

A subdued giggle jolted Marvis mid-step. The crowning tape in his carefully balanced stack twisted under his chin. The videos toppled from his grasp like so many oversized dominos and clattered to the floor.

The giggling sound came again. Moonlight washed the living room from an Anderson bay window, the sash bars casting a dark net over the brass-and-mahogany pool table that dominated the room.

And lying on the pool table . . . something, or someone.

Marvis squinted. His green eyes zeroed in on a tangle of crisp blond hair framed by a square of black shadow. The giggles spilled into full laughter. A pair of lips were trapped in the black shadow frame.

But these lips couldn't laugh. It was impossible.

Stiff fingers entered the shadow-frame and caressed the waiting lips, twisting them into a dull purple smile. Marvis didn't breathe. The girl's long legs were beautiful, her fingers slim and eager, her skin as pale as a winter moon. A naked foot traveled her smooth calf as her fingers danced. Two perfect knees came together, then parted. And then she laughed again, her firm belly shuddering as she sat up. Straight, long hair swept a face that seemed nothing more than shadow. But Marvis didn't need to see this face to recognize it. It was locked in his memory.

Blond cobweb strands tickled her hardening nipples. The net of shadows embraced her, slicing her arms and legs at the joints, turning her torso into a complex jigsaw. The shadows were only a trick of moonlight and window sashes. Marvis knew that, just as he knew that the shadows had transformed the girl into something both obscene and pathetic—a living, breathing butcher's diagram.

But she wasn't living. Not this girl. She wasn't breathing.

Her face was nothing more than a shadow.

He was seeing—

Her laughter was the only thing that lurked in the shadows.

He was hearing—

She was a ghost.

Somehow, Marvis managed to choke back his scream. But it stayed with him, a secret locked in his chest, even when she turned on the lights.

◆ ◆

She closed the drapes, still laughing. "Well, it's what you get for leaving your front door unlocked. *Anybody* could have wandered in here."

Something witty. Marvis knew that he was supposed to say something witty. That was the game. But he couldn't think of anything to say.

"You should have seen yourself," she said.

He was still frightened. She wasn't a ghost. That's what he kept telling himself. She wasn't a dead girl. She was only Shelly Desmond, a fifteen-year-old piece of meat who stood naked in his living room, thinking that she was funny.

"I mean it, Marvis." She giggled. "Oh, man, the look on your face."

He glanced away sharply. At the ebony videocassettes on the white pine floor. At his whiteboy loafers, his faded black jeans. At his black hands hanging there before him, long fingers still trembling.

Negro hands. African American hands.

No. Not quite. His hands were the sweet color of butterscotch. Come August, any redneck had darker skin than his.

"And your eyes." Shelly wiped away tears of laughter. "Your eyes were as big as saucers."

Marvis glared at the girl. "*As big as saucers.*" The words were ice on his tongue. "Like a spook butler in some old movie. Is that what you mean, Shelly?"

She crossed her arms over her breasts, as if exasperated. "I didn't mean . . . Geeze, Marvis, why do you say things like that? It's the *nineties*. Wake up. All that stuff happened a long time ago. Do you think I'd even be here if I was like that?"

"There's the money."

"That hurts, Marvis."

She pouted, and, of course, that made her a magnet. Marvis came to her. His fingers encircled her tiny wrists. Gently, he moved her arms to her sides, forced her hands against the cold brass rail of the pool table. "You can't imagine, Shelly."

She didn't look away, and that struck him as particularly brave. "It doesn't matter anymore," she said. "It doesn't matter what color—"

His grip tightened. "But you like my color, don't you, Shell? You're the one who told me that I'm the

man with the sweet butterscotch skin." She giggled, and for a moment her arms relaxed. "But what if my skin was darker? And what if my eyes weren't green? What if they were as brown as dirt? What if my skin was black as unsweetened chocolate? Would you still want a taste of me?"

The muscles in Shelly's arms became knots of nervous tension. The pool table shuddered, and Marvis caught sight of the eight ball teetering on the edge of the corner pocket nearest him.

Teetering there, on the edge of a pit of shadow. An ebony sphere on the brink of a pit. A *bottomless* pit like the shadowface he'd imagined seeing earlier . . .

No, that face belonged to Shelly. Shelly, and a few shadows. And now the shadows were gone and Shelly wasn't so frightening. Or brave. She looked away—not daring to struggle, actually blushing if that could be believed—and it was Marvis's turned to laugh. He released her wrists and stroked her rosy cheeks with his sweet butterscotch fingers.

"You're red, Shell," he said. "You're a little Indian."

"A little native American," she corrected, and they both laughed.

◆ ◆

His fingers left her cheeks, traveling more familiar territory.

"Don't you want to get the camera?" she asked.

"Maybe we'll do this just for us."

"You want to do it here? On the pool table?"

He thought of the dead girl as he looked into Shelly's eyes, and he had to laugh at the misplaced fear that he'd felt just a few moments before. "Yeah." His fingers smoothed the cool green felt that surrounded the eight ball, never quite touching the ball itself. "It's something I've always wanted to do."

"I don't know . . ." Shelly was looking over his shoulder now, not looking at him at all.

He sensed someone behind him, watching. In an instant the fear was back with him. There were plenty of self-righteous cops in the world and there were plenty of people in his business who were much more dangerous than any self-righteous cop.

He turned quickly, confronting nothing more dangerous than an old hand-tinted wedding photo of his father and mother that hung on the wall.

Marvis smiled. So this was the source of Shelly's unease. He had always thought the photo told the truth. His father's skin so black, his mother's so white. In the wedding photo, Marvis's mother was almost as white as her dress. In reality, his mother's skin had been the color of a honeycomb still slick with sweetness. Marvis was nearly that light, though his hair was darker than his mother's.

"It's like they're watching us," Shelly whispered. "And your father looks so angry."

"Of course he looks angry," Marvis said flatly. "He was a cop. Cops always look angry, especially when they're off duty."

"Oh, Jesus." She giggled. "You're kidding, right?"

Marvis shook his head.

"Did he know? I mean, did he know what you do? How you make your money?"

"He died when I was in college. A junkie slit his throat three months before he was due to retire. My mother's heart gave out a few weeks later. All they knew was that I wanted to open a camera shop."

"I'm sorry," she said. Marvis knew that she wanted to say more, so he didn't say anything. "That must make it so hard for you. Knowing what they'd think." She stared at the picture, trying to find something of Marvis in his father's face. "If he knew that someone like me was in his house . . . I mean, he'd hate me."

Marvis stroked her pale breasts, inhaled her perfume. God, she even smelled white. "No, he wouldn't hate you." The conclusion was simple, logical. "Not my father."

Marvis turned the photograph to the wall, but Shelly couldn't bring herself to look away. "Maybe we could use a little something to take the edge off," she suggested.

Marvis nodded. Shelly slipped from the table and started toward the hallway, but he stopped her with a single glance.

"I know where it is," she said. "Remember? You showed me—the very first time, when we did it in the bedroom."

"I'll get it," he said.

♦ ♦

His girls were waiting for him in the bedroom.

Marvis winked at them. "I guess I haven't lost my touch," he said, and his voice held genuine surprise rather than the hollow ring of braggadocio.

Marvis always felt like a teenage boy when he entered his bedroom. It didn't really seem like an adult's room at all, not with his girls there. It would forever belong to a nervous teenager that everyone had known as Shutterbug.

Marvis stared at his girls, trying to see them as he once had, with Shutterbug eyes. To his younger eye they had been perfection. Now he could see their flaws. A nose that was just a little too large. Teenage breasts that would never swell to desired dimensions. A smile that would be eternally crooked, because orthodontia wasn't covered on blue-collar health plans.

And here they were, eighteen years later, still locked in his bedroom. Each one of them trapped in an eight-by-ten inch frame, sealed behind a slab of clear glass. Untouched and untouchable.

Their smiles glowed. Girls were different back in the seventies. At least these girls were different. A little more innocent. Not much, but just enough. They weren't like the knowing nineties girls with caked-on vampire make-up who visited Marvis's camera shop to pose for their senior portraits. And they weren't at all like Shelly Desmond, who dressed like an MTV exec's idea of a bad girl. When she wore any clothes at all, that is. No, Shutterbug's girls would have died of shame in Shelly Desmond's skin. They were daddy's princesses, and they behaved as such. In Shutterbug's



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photographs they wore princess smiles untouched by the cold hand of life.

At eighteen, Marvis had believed that his camera was the only thing that could get him close to that kind of girl. His tongue was more tin than silver, and he certainly wasn't a jock. His father despised athletics, believing that too many promising black youths crippled themselves playing stupid games that didn't mean anything. Chess club was as exciting as it got for Marvis.

But the kid everyone called Shutterbug could make wonderful pictures. He told his girls that he was going to grow up to be a fashion photographer. And they believed him, just as they believed that they were going to find careers as models or actresses. Marvis snapped some of them so often that he memorized their entire wardrobes, learning which blouses went with which skirts, which sweaters or T-shirts were acceptable with bell-bottomed Levi's. Even now he could remember their shoes—mostly those awful cork platform things that girls had worn in the days of disco—though recalling the range of a girl's footwear after all this time seemed a little sick, even to Marvis.

But he was never *Marvis* to those girls. He was *Shutterbug*. It was a whitebread name he could hide behind, a nickname that would have fit a friend of Marcia or Jan on *The Brady Bunch*, a name that got him past the watchful mother or father who answered the kitchen phone, securing passage to the ear of the girl who lay on her bed with a pink Princess extension balanced on her flat white stomach.

Even now, eighteen years later, he had to smile at his ingenuity. A whitebread princess's parents would have been naturally suspicious if their daughter had received a call from someone named *Marvis*. The kid everyone called Shutterbug couldn't believe that his father hadn't recognized that simple fact. The old man had certainly considered Marvis's voice and diction, because he had taken the time to beat the neighborhood street talk out of his only son. But he'd missed the name—*Marvis*—a real tip-off to any bigot.

Marvis grinned at the very idea of his father making a mistake. Maybe the old man had been human after all.

Marvis still used his voice to make business contacts on the telephone, just as he still used his camera to make social connections.

The camera had brought Shelly here tonight.

No, it wasn't the camera. The money brought her here.

Marvis laughed. "Shut up, Shutterbug."

He opened the bedroom closet. Two shoe boxes were shoved toward the back of the middle shelf. He opened the box on the right, razored a couple of lines onto a cosmetic mirror for Shelly, then did a few discreet toots of his own with a gold coke spoon that he kept in the box.

The rush caught him and his eyelids fluttered. He was nowhere for a brief instant, and then he was staring down at a bent photo jammed in a box of high school junk. It was a shot of the cheerleading squad that he'd snapped in his senior year. Five beauties in the foreground, and in the background—barely visible through a biology lab window made nearly opaque by hard afternoon sunlight—a young man's silhouette. Faceless, but anyone who looked closely enough to see the solitary figure knew instinctively *what* the young man was watching.

Voyeurism. Some things you didn't have to see clearly to know what they were. *Or more simply put, Marvis thought, it takes one to know one.*

Not that anyone would notice the young man's silhouette now. The photo had been ruined long ago at the direction of the editor of the 1976 yearbook, a real ice princess named Amelia Peyton. Well, the order had come from the vice principal himself, but Amy Peyton had obviously enjoyed passing it on. Shutterbug had been forced to *excise*—that was the vice principal's word—the face of the cheerleader who'd been kicked off the squad. He had backed the hole with some black mounting paper, and once that was done the viewer's attention was invariably drawn to the stark nothingness of the black pit.

Minutes ago, in the living room, Shutterbug's eyes had been drawn to the ebony eight ball and the pocket of shadow on the pool table in just the same way. And before that, an equally strong, nearly magnetic pull had drawn his gaze to a face lost in shadow behind a curtain of blond hair.

The face of a ghost.

No. Only the face of Shelly Desmond.

Marvis closed the closet.

The faceless ghost was gone. Hidden away.

Shelly was in the living room.

Suddenly, Marvis wanted to be with her.



Barefoot now, wearing only a black silk robe, Marvis returned to the living room, and Shelly.

The girl had stacked the scattered videos, save one, on a shelf above Marvis's stereo. The other cassette was playing in the VCR. Shelly lay on a throw rug in front of the 32" Sony television, a video remote held in her hand, studying her mirror image. The two Shellys moaned in unison. Marvis had to smile. To think that, even in shadow, he hadn't recognized Shelly's busy fingers.

Shelly hadn't noticed his presence. He set the coke-lined mirror on the edge of the pool table and watched her. There was almost something innocent about her unconscious nudity.

But there was nothing innocent about the girl on



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the screen.

And he'd never feel the same way about her, anyway. He knew that. He'd never desire her in that crazy, unquenchable way. That was the hell of it. Shelly's eyes were wrong. They were green, not gray. And her hair was wrong. It was straight and uniformly pale, not curled and frosted, as the girl's hair had been on that night in 1976. That girl, whose face had been excised from the 1976 Lance & Shield, she'd had a wonderful smile, too, one of those Mona Lisa smiles that were as good as a whispered secret you could never forget even if you wanted to.

The girl with the excised face had been the main attraction in the first erotica Shutterbug photographed (Shutterbug never called it *porno*—that was *declassé*, one of the first words you learned to avoid when you got involved in the industry). A little 16mm job he had done at eighteen. It had been a complete surprise, that film. Nothing he had ever planned to do, but those fifty feet of 16mm had started him on the road to fortune, if not fame.

And now that girl was dead. April Destino was gone from this veil of tears. Shutterbug had read about it in the paper. OD'd, or a suicide, or something.

But tonight he'd seen her ghost.

A shiver of excitement sizzled the length of Shutterbug's spine. He smiled, amazed that he was actually old enough for nostalgia. He hadn't watched that loop of film in quite a while. He used video these days, but he still had the 16mm equipment around. The old Bell & Howell projector was in a closet upstairs. The screen was in the basement. And the film itself, where the hell was it?

Shutterbug grinned. Amazing. He had a hard-on, and Shelly hadn't even touched him.

Amazing. He'd take care of Shelly, just the way he wanted to. Do her right there on the pool table. Then he'd get rid of her, make a little popcorn, and have a retrospective of the early works of Marvis Hanks, Junior. That's exactly what he would do.

He ran a finger along a stack of CDs until he found the one he was looking for. Some good old seventies whitebread music, the kind they used to play on KFRC. Forgotten names like K.C. & the Sunshine Band, England Dan and John Ford Coley, and Janis Ian.

The CD rack whirled open at the touch of a button. He studied the selections listed on the silver face of a disc. "I'd Really Love to See You Tonight." That's what he'd play, just for the irony.

Something thumped against the bay window.

The CD box slipped from Marvis's fingers, cracked against the floor.

Outside, someone laughed.

Marvis glanced at the closed drapes. Stared at Shelly.

Her eyes were as big as saucers. "I didn't tell anyone," she said. "No one knows that I'm here . . . Not my parents. Not my boyfriend. I . . . I did just like you said, Marvis. I didn't tell—"

All he had to do was twist his head. Shelly grabbed her little backpack, unzipped the bottom compartment, pulled out a top and a pair of shorts, all the time moving across the room and into the kitchen.

Shelly was moving fast, but Marvis was moving way too slow.

Again, something thumped against the window.

Again, someone laughed.

Marvis turned off the television. He summoned his courage and opened the drapes.

The slamming sound startled him, and he glanced toward the kitchen. The door to the side patio didn't catch, swung open again.

Shelly was gone.

Had someone come in the side door and snatched her? Or had she been so frightened that she ran off? Did she know something?

Had she told someone? Had she sold him out?

Time would tell. It was very quiet. Marvis stood before the window, waiting for some answers. The front lawn was a sloping slab of blackness in the still night. His Jaguar sat in the driveway, a sleek silhouette. He framed the shot through the wood-bordered pane of an Anderson window without consciously knowing he was doing it. Second nature, and natural as could be—a picture, a rectangle of glass, and a wooden frame. The light behind him was just strong enough so that his reflection was visible on the glass in the foreground, the ghost vision of the living room sharper than the world outside.

And then it was there—in the background on the other side of the nearly opaque window, on the lawn of slate—a man's silhouette.

Someone was out there. Someone who laughed.

Marvis couldn't see eyes, but he knew the stranger was watching him.

Some things you didn't have to see clearly to know what they were.

No still photo, this. No frozen frame. This figure moved, but Marvis couldn't. He stood rooted in front of the expensive window, watching the dark man advance through his reflection.

Suddenly, Marvis's reflection became a black hole as deep and empty as the missing face of April Louise Destino in that old photo.

A ghost's face flew at Marvis from out of the blackness, coming fast.

Coming so very fast.

But this face was not a black shadow. It was dead white.

White as a negative image of the black hole that had replaced April Destino's face in the old photograph.

White as a negative image of an eight ball.

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ROUGH CUTS

Before we dive into the usual review pool—plus the 1993 edition of the Dylan Dog Horror Fest—thought I'd pass along a few musings on the recent re-release of Disney's animated "classic," *Snow White*.

Is it just me, or does this movie suck?

Well, ok—maybe that's a little harsh. *Snow White* is a classic, at least in the historical sense, since it's Disney's first animated feature. The film also contains two enduring songs ("Heigh-Ho, Heigh-Ho", "Someday My Prince Will Come") and some indelible sequences (the dwarves working their jewel mine, the Queen's transformation into a witch).

But!

I recently had the odd experience of attending an afternoon matinee of *Snow White* where I was the only man in attendance. Hell, the only male—the few other viewers scattered around the AMC Burbank 14 were all mothers/aunts/whatnots with their daughters/nieces/whatever. And as I mulled over the reaction of this exclusively feminine group to *Snow White*'s timehonored emotional spikes (laughter at Dopey, sobs at Snowy's death), it suddenly struck me that the overwhelmingly positive reaction to this film might be

nothing more than a critical knee-jerk.

Is that because critics haven't been able to really *study* *Snow White*? After all, this is one of the few Disney films unavailable on laserdisc or tape, and the Disney people only release it to theaters every six years or so. Yet I distinctly remember walking away from a mid-Eighties release of *Snow White* with a gnawing sense of dissatisfaction. Back then, I couldn't put my finger on the cause (probably all those beers I had beforehand).

This time, though, *Snow White*'s primary problem came to me in a rush of brains to the head.

It's the story.

I mean, pardon the pun, but we talkin' *sketchy* here.

Snow White opens with the Evil Queen pissed off at her Magic Mirror (Queeny's upset that she's no longer the fairest in the land, but you know that). We then watch the hatching of a murderous plot, see Snowy taken to a meadow by a huntsman who can't kill her, and watch White escape into a nicely haunted woods.

Alright, fine. That's the first five minutes. A little rushed, maybe, in terms of setting up the plot, but acceptable.

And then?

Snowy discovers the dwarves' messy cottage. She cleans it up. Cooks. Cleans some more.

Then Snowy sings some songs. The *dwarves* sing some songs. Everybody eats. They dance. They sing some *more* goddamn songs—as, by now, almost an hour into the film, my wandering eyes have counted every track light on the theater's ceiling.

Twice.

Anyway, later than sooner the Queen eventually revisits her Magic Mirror. Queeny spies Snowy singing in the woods, realizes she's been had, and turns herself into a witch.

The Witch now poisons an apple. Snowy eats it and collapses into a coma. The Witch falls off a cliff. The dwarves build a glass coffin. As for the poor Handsome Prince (who's so far been relegated to a walk-on), he now opens that coffin.

The Prince kisses Snowy. Up she pops, singing her little heart out. And off they go—to cook or sing some more songs, one presumes—as ye tired author realizes that this wrap-up's been stuffed into the film's final seven minutes.

The End.

Believe me, *Snow White*'s story reads longer than it plays; I've never seen such a thin, lopsided

plot structure patched on to such a longggg 83 minutes. So what's the bottom line?

Snow White is dull.

Even for kids.

However, I should point out that the film negative for the 1993 release of *Snow White* was digitally restored to breathtakingly reveal every brushstroke of its strangely Max Fleischerish-like art. And, again, the film has historical worth, if for nothing else than to serve as proof that Walt Disney would take a giant storytelling leap forward with the release of his next feature, *Pinochio*.

But I really wish everyone would stop kissing Snowy's creamy little butt like she was God or something.

'Cause frankly, she's a bore.

RETURN OF THE DYLAN DOG HORROR FEST

Faithful *Rough Cuts* readers no doubt recall last year's rhapsodic recount of Italy's Dylan Dog Horror Fest, one of the largest and best-run of European film festivals. Well, this year I was fortunate enough to be invited back for the DDHF 4.

And guess what?

It was better.

Held from May 30 through June 5 at Milan's Palatrussardi sports arena, DDHF 4 featured twenty (primarily American) Horror films, with other entries from England, New Zealand and Holland. Dylan Dog isn't a competitive fest, by the way; no prizes are awarded. Instead, Sergio Bonelli Editore (one of Italy's largest comic book publishers) puts on the annual Fest as a combination promotional event and "Thank You" to the hundreds of thousands of Italian fans who've made Bonelli's *Dylan Dog* the most successful

comic in Italy.

Some backstory here; *Dylan Dog* is the rough Italian equivalent of our own *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, at least in terms of popularity. An afternoon stroll through Milano would reveal the Dylan likeness and logo everywhere, on notebooks, towels, software, etc. As for the titled character, Dylan Dog is a private eye of the supernatural who, along with a comic sidekick named Groucho, tackles witches, vampires and serial killers through an ongoing series of moody, well-drawn adventures that are definitely more adult-oriented than the *Turtles*. And Dylan's popularity is growing; stylish Italian film director Michele Soavi is currently shooting a film based on a novel by Dylan Dog creator Tiziano Sclavi (titled *Dellamorte, Dellamore*), and the *Dylan Dog* comics themselves will soon be printed here in America under the title *Damien Deathrealm*. By Tundra, the same American group which puts out the *Ninja Turtles*!

Anyway, the Dylan Dog Horror Fest is dedicated to bringing quality horror films to Italy, a country which at the moment is suffering a severe dry spell regarding homegrown film production. Attendance to the Fest is free. All it takes to get in is to show a copy of any Dylan Dog publication. Moreover, the Festival definitely has a rock n' roll, youth-oriented edge. In fact, last year *Deep Red* editor Chas. Balun described the DDHF as the "Woodstock of Horror." Couldn't have said it better myself.

This year's festival boasted a staggering attendance of around 6,000 fans per night, all wallowing in the horrors flowing from a movie-palace sized screen and a rock-concert quality sound system. Two to three films were screened each evening, and as per tradition many were introduced by the filmmakers themselves.

Among the guests were: Robert (Freddy Krueger) Englund;

director Wes Craven and his producer, Marianne Maddalena; actors Randy Quaid and Lance Henriksen (who was . . . interesting); actor/director Alex Winter (From *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*); producer/director Brian Yuzna (*Re-Animator*); scream queen Linnea Quigley; directors Richard Stanley (*Hardware*), Adam Simon (*Brain Dead, Carnosaur*) and Tony Randel (*Hellbound: Hellraiser II*); special effects makeup guru Steve Johnson (*Ghostbusters*); indie action director James Glickenhaus (*The Exterminator, Shakedown*). Plus yours truly, of course, who enjoyed meeting new friends Alan Jones and Nigel Floyd, two noted English film critics.

Now, I could go on with this minutia by detailing the lavish perks which the Dylan Dog folks shower upon their guests (like the free meals at The Caffè Milano or the comfortable hotels, which, in my case, meant being housed right across the street from Da Vinci's *Last Supper*). But let's just say that such key DDHF personnel as Artistic Director Stefano Marzorati (who's published an excellent Italian-language "Horror Rock Encyclopedia"), Guest Coordinators Loris Curci and Martin Hemingway, people like Mary Rinaldi and the ever-gracious Sergio Bonelli himself went way out of their way to make us shabby Americans feel like little kings. Their kindness, thoughtfulness and professionalism was, as ever, truly appreciated.

On to the films. The wonderful thing about these Festivals is that hardcore fans like myself get to see rare or otherwise obscure genre offerings on the big screen, titles which otherwise might wind up on the cramped confines of a video monitor. And the quality of this year's films seemed higher than those screened at the '92 Fest, with at least seven pictures standing head and shoulders above the pack.

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these pictures when/if they hit your local theaters or video racks. Believe me, they're worth searching out.

As always, films are rated on the star system, four stars being best.

Body Snatchers (1993 - USA) ***
Director: Abel Ferrara, With: Meg Tilly, Gabrielle Anwar, Forest Whitaker.

Only one word does justice to this third version of Jack Finney's mid-Fifties paranoia novel—AMAZING!

New York indie sleazemeister Abel Ferrara (*Ms. 45*, *The King of New York*, *Bad Lieutenant*) goes big-budget this time out, as a resourceful teenager (Gabrielle Anwar, Al Pacino's dancing partner in *Scent of a Woman*) arrives with her dysfunctional family at a Midwestern Army Post—only to find that podlike aliens from a nearby swamp have re-

placed the local inhabitants.

While it may not be much of a stretch to imagine the American military as soulless monsters, and while Ferrara has removed some of the subtlety evident in the two earlier *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Don Seigel's 1956 and Philip Kaufman's 1978 versions), this remake is still something special. Tense, cruel and nasty, it teasingly toys with both a liberal's fear of the military and a teenager's suspicions of adults; Ferrara also stages a classic suspense sequence set in a bathtub, manages to get a dynamite performance out of the normally flaky Meg Tilly, and a little boy gets thrown from a helicopter (proving that, despite the heightened budget, this is still an Abel Ferrara film!)

Creepy atmosphere. Subversive energy. Stunning cinematography. Need I say that this particular invasion of the *Body*

Snatchers was a Fest highlight, and a personal fave?

Dead Alive aka Braindead (1992 - New Zealand) *** D: Peter Jackson, With: Timothy Balme, Diana Penalver, Elizabeth Moody, Ian Watkin.

New Zealand grossout genius Peter Jackson follows up his trash masterpiece *Meet The Feebles* with this very funny, very moist sendup of every hungry zombie movie ever made.

Time, the late Fifties. Nerdy Lionel Cosgrove (Timothy Balme) yearns for romance with the lovely Paquita (Diana Penalver). But Lionel's domestic problems puts his love life on hold. Seems his domineering mother has just been bitten by a Sumatran Rat Monkey (I), and is slowly turning into a flesh-eating zombie.

This silly exercise in excess has been called the bloodiest pic-

ture ever made, and while that claim may only be slightly exaggerated (especially to those who've seen *Rikho O*), I don't see how anyone can take the gore in *Dead Alive* seriously. I mean, we're talkin' kung-fu fighting priests and ambulatory anus here!

Perhaps a better label would be the bloodiest comedy ever made. Because any time *Dead Alive's* humorous elements bubble up, Jackson shines. For example, there's a hilarious dinner party—with pus as the desert—and a marvelous clockwork routine involving a baby zombie in a playground, which is a slapstick mini-classic.

So sure it's gory. But basically, *Dead Alive* is a joke.

Got that?

Dust Devil—The Final Cut (1993 - England) ** D: Richard Stanley, With: Robert Burke, Chelsea Field, Zakes Hoka.

This film, however—sensual, moody, beautiful—is deadly serious.

Based on a true incident, *Dust Devil* concerns a mysterious stranger (Robert Robocop 3 Burke) who appears in the Namibia desert mere days before that African nation's independence. Drifting through a parched landscape of overwhelming drought and social turmoil, the Stranger stages a series of brutal murders which soon has black policeman (Zakes Modae) in hot pursuit. But what began as a simple string of homicides slowly shifts into the supernatural, as the murderer leaves behind strange tribal symbols which suggest his carnage is actually motivated by demonic forces.

More art film than straight genre piece, *Dust Devil* is going to cause lots of expectation problems in those looking for a kinetic repeat of director Richard Stanley's previous cyberpunk film *Hardware* (which was an outrageously overrated debut). For *Dust Devil* is a slow, hypnotic work, a complex vis-

ual metaphor for the local legends and societal fragmentation of Stanley's own disintegrating homeland (South Africa). Gorgeously shot, *Dust Devil* also contains meditations on loneliness, apartheid, dislocation from nature and contemporary alienation. That last concern is crystallized in the character of bored housewife Chelsea Field, who becomes the Stranger's wary lover.

Yet what gives *Dust Devil* its admirable credibility is Stanley's dogged sincerity. This is a very personal work, suffused with its director's mystical and social concerns. And despite the exploitive trappings—blood, nudity, a radical exploding head—it's Stanley's obsessive devotion to symbolism and otherworldly states which gives *Dust Devil* such haunting, resonant power.

Incidentally, the Dylan Dog Fest screened a "director's cut" of this film. Apparently, Stanley's stubborn refusal to push *Dust Devil* into more commercially acceptable areas led the film's U.S. distributor (Miramax) to severely cut back on *Dust Devil's* character development, magic and melancholy.

Here's hoping we all get to see Stanley's original cut. For it's precisely this director's unusual compound of adult, real-world concerns with heartfelt spirituality that allows *Dust Devil* to sing such a pure, mystical aria.

And if today's ruthlessly pragmatic society can't hear that music, it's not Richard Stanley's fault.

Freaked (1993 - USA) ** 1/2 D: Tom Stern, Alex Winter, With: Alex Winter, Randy Quaid, Michael Stoyanov, Megan Ward.

This likeable cross between Tod Browning's *Freaks* and a deranged Disney comedy stars codirector Alex Winter (of *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*) as Ricky Coogin, arrogant salesman for the greedy E.E.S. (Everything Except Shoes) Corporation. Sent by his

company to South America to promote E.E.S.'s new (and toxic) biogenetic fertilizer Zygot-24, Winter is instead captured by crazed Elijah C. Skuggs (Randy Quaid), the owner of a traveling freak show. Before you can say "Pollution!" Ricky's been transformed into a hideous mutant—one who'll soon learn that beauty is, indeed, only skin deep.

Goofy, good-natured and fun, *Freaked* boasts some great full-body makeups by Steve Johnson and Screaming Mad George. Winter and Quaid (who seems to be having an especially good time) give enjoyably hammy performances, and there's a neat rasslin' match between two cool Big Daddy Roth-inspired monsters. Overall, the film's smart-alecky tone is just what you'd expect from the directors of MTV's lampoonish comedy "The Idiot Box."

Freaked's biggest liability is its last act; things drag a bit. But hey—where else can you see a human toad catch airplanes with his tongue?

The Johnsons aka Xangadix (1993 - Holland) *** D: Rudolf van den Berg, With: Esmee de la Bretonniere, Monique van de Ven, Kenneth Herdigein

A fourteen-year-old girl (Esmee de la Bretonniere) is plagued by recurring nightmares in which baldheaded men daub walls with human blood to create strange embryonic designs. Meanwhile, an anthropology professor is investigating the strange history of the Mahxitu Indians, a mysterious tribe whose legends state that the omnipotent god Xangadix will someday beget seven males to impregnate their own sister. She, in turn, will give birth to a monster, one which will destroy the world. But wait—what's going on at that nearby secret government installation, where seven telepathetic mutes have just slaughtered their keepers?

If you think this plot summary's complicated, you should see the film! About four different narrative threads float through this exciting, highly polished production. Still, they all mesh satisfyingly in the end. Aided by exceptional imagery and strong visual storytelling (it *had* to be strong, since I watched this one in its original Dutch language, with Italian subtitles!), *The Johnson's* is a real find—bloody, smart, gripping, and stylish as hell.

Unfortunately, no one in the U.S. has picked up this crosspollinated shocker for distribution yet.

Anyone out there know of a hungry video company?

Killing Box, The (1993 - USA) ***
D: George Hickenlooper, With: Corbin Bernsen, Adrian Pasdar, Ray Wise, Cyndia Williams, Martin Sheen

Directed by one of the makers of the excellent *Hearts of Darkness* (a documentary tracing the making of *Apocalypse Now*), *The Killing Box* seems very much like a Civil War variant on Coppola's Vietnam epic. With a bit of *Carnival of Souls* thrown in.

A brigade of Confederate soldiers is massacred by Union troops utilizing a military maneuver called "the killing box" (boxing in an enemy on all sides). The sole survivor of this catastrophe, Corbin Bernsen, is then forced by the Yankees to investigate a series of bizarre crucifixions occurring on that same battlefield. What Bernsen and a small company of Union soldiers then discover brings them face-to-face with slavery, the undead and vicious African gods.

The Killing Box is an odd one; it looks like a TV movie, but it doesn't feel like one. Director George Hickenlooper takes great pains to evoke the kind of subtle eeriness more associated with Val Lewton than with today's guts-in-your-lap goremeisters, but then he also keeps trying to recreate *Apoca-*

ypse Now Civil War style. The similarities between these two films are almost embarrassing; part of Bernsen's mission is to eliminate what the Union thinks is a rogue Yankee regiment (*ala* Martin Sheen's mission in *Now*), there's a ponderous voice-over narration, and Sheen himself pops up as a ruthless military commander!

Yet this moody little curiosity somehow integrates its atmospheric/rip-off elements. The end result is a commendably offbeat offering, half art film, half horror film. Ambrose Bierce would have been proud.

Ticks (1993 - USA) **1/2 D: Tony Randel, With: Rosalind Allen, Ami Dolenz, Seth Green, Virginia Keehne, Clint Howard

No way could this be called a good film, but it is fun. It also has great monsters! Giant, mutated, bloodsucking ticks. Ones that kill dogs. That kill teens. That go *bloosh!* when you step on 'em.

Story concerns a group of inner-city kids camping in the wilderness, who're beset by a gaggle of carnivorous bugs spawned from the additives used by some local marijuana growers (!). The plot's just a pretext to stage a series of ever-increasing giant tick attacks, though, ones that call to mind the Fifties' bad-bug monster movies.

So while *Ticks* may be stupid, sloppy and disjointed, it's still a hoot. Incidentally, perennial B-movie weirdo Clint Howard (brother of Ron) puts in an appearance. As the world's ugliest pot farmer.

And there we are.

Some final thoughts:

To me, the *Dylan Dog Horror Fest* has the potential for being Europe's most important horror film festival (it's already the friendliest). The high degree of professionalism and the sheer number of films/celebrities on hand each year really do make the DDHF

something special. I look forward to future plans of the Sergio Bonelli Editore organization with great anticipation.

By all means, if you can get there, try to visit the Dylan Dog Fest yourself next summer.

I'll keep you posted.

VIDEO REVIEWS

Sure wish I could go into the more personal side of the DDHF. Like the day Milan went wild after winning a national soccer tournament. Or how Lance Henriksen disappeared one night. Or how the Fest boasted an impressive stage set designed by Italian makeup effects ace Sergio Stivalletti. Or how, *after* the Fest, I spent a few fascinating days in the small Swiss village of Vex with up-and-coming author Wildy Petoud (whose savage "Accident d'Amour" appears in my 1994 *Splatterpunk 2* anthology).

Unfortunately, the slavemasters here at CD Publications keep a merciless eye on my word count. So let's finish this off with two video reviews. These tapes can be ordered from—

Video Search of Miami
P.O. Box 16-1917
Miami, FL 33116
(305) 279-9773

—a company that specializes in demented rarities.

Onward!

Emergency! Living Dead in Tokyo Bay (1991 - Japan) **1/2 D: Kazuo "Gaira" Komizu, With: Cuti Suzuki (really!), Ita Kirihaara, Tomoko Hayase.

Delightfully absurd low-budget trash (from the director of the disturbing *Entrails off a Virgin*) employs action movie, *Robocop* and the living dead motifs as a giant meteor smashes into Tokyo Bay to

release a deadly extraterrestrial gas. Said gas imbues deceased Japanese with a craving for human flesh, so martial law is quickly imposed. Now it's up to our spunky female heroine—clad in a hightech cybersuit—to come to the city's rescue!

This one's *really* nuts, kids. Punks, rabid Japanese nationalists, zombie armies, rock n' roll; it's all here. Grab a copy and a cold one—*Tokyo Bay's* the perfect sort of entertainment for those nights when you've only got a six-pack or some chemicals for company. Mindaltering substances certainly help the film's occasional pokiness and laugh-out-loud ridiculousness!

Although how can you have a show that was so obviously designed for Japanese drive-ins?

Not that there *are* Japanese drive-ins.

Captured for Sex 2 (199? - Japan) **1/2 (No director or cast credits)

Every now and then I like to roll around in the sort of unbuttoned garbage that gleefully wallows in everything politically incorrect. And nothing's more un-PC than Japanese sadomasochism.

Captured for Sex 2 is an outrageous example of that; it delights in being rude. Minimal plot has a young couple being kidnapped by a sadist, who proceeds to rape and brutalize them in the most degrading ways imaginable. Worse, the couple *enjoy* it! Before long they've joined in for some more kidnappings, which includes a catalog of hardcore antiwoman S&M diversions. Dishsoap enemas, whips, clothespins, candle wax, flaming acupuncture needles, hot irons up the ass, and so on and so forth.

Obviously, this isn't the kind of tape you'll want to pop in at your next NOW meeting. Yet while I'm not a fan of Japanese sexism or S&M (although any kind of sex, as long as it's consensual, is fine by me), I

am fascinated by the totally uninhibited material Japan's filmmakers routinely splash across their screens.

What's *really* fascinating, though, is the fact that Japan has one of the lowest murder/rape rates in the entire industrialized world.

Maybe there's something to this argument about vicariously getting off through fantasy after all.

Whatever; here's a *real* endurance test for those blasé sleaze junkies who think they've seen everything.

It's a wrap.

Next time we may have the space to finally get around to my new "Overlooked and Under-rated" section, which takes an in-depth analysis of those films deserving a second peek.

"Till then, I leave you with this:

Director John Landis usually litters his movies with an in-joke reference to "See You Next Wednesday," a fictional film which, up until now, I'd always assumed referred to those old "Coming Attractions" taglines. The ones that promised a new theatrical feature in the middle of next week.

The other day, though, I was watching Criterion's exceptional laserdisc of *2001: A Space Odyssey*. And midway through the film, guess what the parents of costar Gary Lockwood say during their televised "Happy Birthday" message, the one that's broadcast to the Jupiter-bound Discovery spacecraft?

That's right—"See You Next Wednesday."

Hmm. Wonder if John Landis is a Stanley Kubrick fan . . . ?

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BOB MORRISH INTERVIEWS DEADLINE PRESS

SPOTLIGHT ON PUBLISHING

Over the last couple of years, this column has taken "up close and personal" looks at a number of small press publishers. However, I've never had a column that's gotten quite so "up close and personal" as this one. That's because this *Spotlight On Publishing* necessitates that I take a look in the mirror—and present you with a profile of Deadline Press, a publishing firm in which I am one-third partner.

Although I initially questioned the advisability of doing a self-profile such as this, CD editor Rich Chizmar requested that I go ahead and do it, feeling that I could retain some degree of objectivity. Have I succeeded? Well, you'll just have to judge for yourself. Before we begin though, here's a bit of background information on Deadline:

Deadline Press began publishing in 1988, when the first issue of *The Scream Factory* appeared. *The Scream Factory* is a quarterly 100+ page magazine dedicated to covering the horror genre. Twelve issues of the magazine have appeared so far, and contents primarily consist of news, articles, interviews, and reviews, with occasional fiction. Deadline has also gone on to publish hardcover books and chapbooks, and there are plans to expand efforts in these areas.

The cast of characters behind the scenes at Deadline has changed significantly since the press first opened its doors for business, but the current line-up—consisting of myself, Peter Infantino, and John Scoleri—has remained constant since October of 1990, when I joined the fray. The questions in the following interview were posed to all three members of the Deadline editing crew, and the collective answers are phrased in a sort of omniscient, schizophrenic third-person fashion—rather strangely appropriate, I think.

CD: How did *The Scream Factory* and Deadline Press come into existence?

TSF: The... genesis of *The Scream Factory* actually began with an ill-fated magazine called *House Carfax*. Peter and two guys named Cliff Brooks and Joe Lopez were part of a group of horror fans who decided to start a magazine, namely *House Carfax*. After the first issue, one member of the group decided that she was going to take complete control of *House Carfax*. Peter, Joe, and Cliff left for greener pastures, and started *The Scream Factory* a few months later.

Right from the beginning, the plan was for *TSF* to be a primarily non-fiction magazine, styled somewhat after Paul Olson's *Horror-*

struck magazine, which ceased publication in 1988, after about... nine or ten issues. Pretty quickly, Peter, Cliff, and Joe discovered that it's more difficult to solicit non-fiction submissions than it is fiction. It was a real struggle to find enough material to fill out the first issue (this is in marked contrast to our recent struggles to find enough room to fit everything—the most recent issue grew another eight pages, to 136). The first issue, which came in at 48 pages with a fair amount of last-minute filler, appeared in October of '88.

As for how the current editors came into the picture... John Scoleri got involved somewhere around the end of 1988. Peter met John while he was working at B. Dalton, and eventually asked him if he wanted to contribute to the magazine. Initially, John just contributed book reviews, but his role gradually grew, and after hanging around for the better part of four issues, John officially became an editor as of issue #6 [which came out in March of '91].

Bob's drafting into the group began when he got a letter one day that essentially said "I've seen your book reviews in various newspapers and magazines, and I was wondering if you'd be interested in contributing to my small press magazine. If you're interested, just drop a note in your mail box, be-

cause I'm not just a small press editor, I'm also your mailman." The letter was from Peter, and Bob pretty readily agreed to contribute to the magazine. Before long, he also agreed to become an editor. Now . . . this means that, at least for a very short time, there were five, count 'em five, editors of the magazine. But this situation didn't last very long.

All five editors did stay together long enough to go to the 1990 World Fantasy Convention in Chicago. And contrary to what you might think, everybody pretty much got along together just fine. But then Joe resigned from *TSF* shortly after the convention, basically saying that he was too busy with his business and various other commitments. Cliff, meanwhile, stepped down in early '91, under somewhat similar circumstances. At that time, the plan was for Cliff to stay peripherally involved with the magazine, writing articles and soliciting ads. However, he soon vanished from the face of the earth. We didn't hear from him

for several months, and really didn't even know if he was alive or dead. Although John now sees him occasionally, Peter and Bob still haven't actually seen him in over two years. Sometimes fact is stranger than fiction.

CD: Not many magazines have three different editors. Are you all just plain "editors?" How do you split up the duties of editing and publishing?

TSF: If it really mattered, we could probably come up with more specific titles for each of us. However, since there's no pressing need to do so, we all just call ourselves editors. As for specific duties . . . Bob handles the magazine layout, edits the submissions, and deals with the printer; Peter does the accounting, takes care of order fulfillment, and takes care of our retail dealers—both order solicitation and collections. John is in charge of relationships with our various wholesale distributors, and recently started handling advertising

solicitation.

Let's see . . . Bob does the layout on his computer at his house, and Peter and John do their stuff out of their homes as well. We only get together in person about once a month (we all live within a 25-mile radius), but we talk on the phone almost every day. However, the getting together in person part is about to change, because Peter is transferring to an Arizona office [several hundred miles away] in November. We plan to continue operations pretty much as they are, and don't foresee any problems with Peter's soon-to-be remote locale, but who knows . . . ?

CD: Did you plan from the beginning to publish books as well?

TSF: No, there were never any plans for that. Peter initially got the idea in his head to do a book when he did a "year's best of the small press" list in *Scream Factory* #3. He went to the other editors [at that time Cliff and Joe] and said



Bob Morrish (left) & Peter Enfantino

"wouldn't it be cool if we could do a collection of these stories?" They weren't excited at all. Peter really had to do a lot of talking to convince them to do it. Of course, he eventually did, and that book idea became *Quick Chills* I.

In fact . . . not only were there not originally plans to publish any books, but there weren't necessar-

Blood Sky



William F. Nolan

Introduction by Joe R. Lansdale

ily any plans for the magazine to be a long-term thing. At the time, Cliff kept saying, "let's just wait and see how the first issue does."

CD: Technically speaking, your first book was the chapbook *Drinking Buddies*, by Wayne Allen Sallee—even though it's never been offered for sale on its own. What's the story behind how this book came about?

TSF: The story behind that was . . . we started getting some subscriptions to the magazine, and we wanted to . . . give something a little extra to the people who trusted in us enough to subscribe to the magazine. And we also wanted to have an extra something to try and . . . induce other people to subscribe.

We chose Wayne because . . . when we approached him to get permission to reprint his story "Bleeding Between The Lines" in

Quick Chills, he was very receptive and real enthusiastic (even though we were working on *Quick Chills* beforehand, *Drinking Buddies* actually came out first). Wayne wound up sending us a new story [*Drinking Buddies*], which we were originally going to run in the magazine. But then we got the idea to print it up as a chapbook and use it as sort of a premium. We weren't all that thrilled with how the chapbook came out—in terms of the production—but there were less than one hundred of those printed, so it's the scarcest Deadline Press item there is.

CD: After *Drinking Buddies*, you came out with *Quick Chills*. Given the fact that there were already two "best of" horror anthologies when you started working on *Quick Chills*, what made you think there was a need for—and a market for—a third "best of" anthology?

TSF: Peter was a faithful reader of the DAW and St. Martin's "year's best" anthologies, and he simply felt that a lot of quality small press material was being overlooked. Volume I of *Quick Chills*, which appeared in February of 1990, sold out very quickly. Of course, the print run was small [500 copies of the trade and 100 of the limited], but we were still very encouraged.

CD: People who've seen a copy of the first *Quick Chills* may have noticed that the binding is somewhat . . . unusual. What's the story behind that?

TSF: At the time, Cliff worked for a bindery and he thought it would be cheaper for us to bind the book ourselves than to send it out. We went to the bindery on a Sunday afternoon, when one of the binding machines wasn't in use, and we sat there for three or four hours and punched holes in the binding, and loaded the pages in, and the whole deal. It was like Bookmak-

ing 101.

CD: You went on to publish a second *Quick Chills* volume, but before that book came out, you published a second chapbook—William F. Nolan's *Blood Sky*. How did this book come about?

TSF: We went to the '89 World Fantasy Convention in Seattle and . . . we brought a few copies of *Drinking Buddies* to show to people. We put a few copies out on the "freebie giveaway" table that they have, and Nolan happened to pick one up. He was impressed by it, although he said that he thought it was a bit primitive. About three weeks later, we got a letter from him saying that he wanted to do a chapbook with us. He'd already decided exactly what it was that he wanted to do—a short story that he would illustrate himself.

So we decided to do it and started to work on it. A guy named Jeff Radt, who at that time was a columnist for the magazine, wound up doing almost all the work on the book, partly because he lived in the L.A. area [near Nolan], and it was easier for them to communicate things back and forth, and—most importantly—he was willing to do it. Poor Jeff wound up doing a lot more work than we ever expected that he'd have to. He initially put together a real beautiful book, with Nolan's illustrations spread out throughout the text. He told Nolan that he was doing this and Nolan said fine. So Jeff put together the whole thing and showed it to Nolan—and Nolan said that *wasn't* what he wanted, that what he wanted was to put all the illustrations together at the end of the book, so it looked like a . . . sketchbook. We weren't real happy with the way things were going at this point, and we came real close to scrapping the whole project. But we talked to Jeff, and he really wanted to finish it, so he went and totally reformat-

ted the book. And it still turned out pretty nice after all.

CD: Getting back to *Quick Chills*: the first volume came out in 1990, but the second didn't come out until 1992—wasn't it originally going to be an annual series? And where's the third volume?

TSF: Peter was thoroughly burned out from having to sift through so many dozens of small press magazines while putting together vol-

keep putting out *Quick Chills* on a bi-annual basis, but we were disappointed with how volume II sold. It's more than broken even for us, but we've still got a fair number of copies left. It seemed like we released the book at the worst possible time—the market was really over-saturated with anthologies at the time. Anyway, the combination of less-than-expected sales and both Peter and Bob being burned out resulted in us putting an end to the *Quick Chills* series.



ume I, and wasn't exactly excited about the prospect of jumping right back into putting together a second volume. In fact, if it had just been left up to Peter, the series probably would have ended with volume I. Bob offered to edit volume II—a decision he later came to regret, when he realized just how much crap he had to read in the course of searching for good stories—but, as a result, the second book came to be a reality. It eventually came out in February of '92.

At that time, the plan was to

CD: There's also a large price discrepancy between volumes I and II of *Quick Chills*: \$25 for the limited edition of the first, and \$45 for the second. How is that price increase warranted, and what made you decide to increase it so substantially?

TSF: The first book was a pretty bare-bones affair—less than 200 pages, not the greatest quality materials, bound. On the other hand, volume II is a much nicer production: twice as many stories, hand-bound in quality material, printed on archival quality paper, and signed by all 26 contributors.

We felt like it was a good deal for the price, especially when you compare it to the prices charged for other limited edition anthologies.

CD: Your most recent hardcover publication is the Richard Laymon collection *A Good, Secret Place*. What made you decide to go with Laymon for your first single-author hardcover book?

TSF: We'd been talking about doing a single-author collection for a

while, and we put together a "short list" of people that we'd like to publish, and who we thought would also be commercially viable. Laymon was high on that list, and when John and Peter went to the Horror Writers of America convention in 1991, they met with Laymon and discussed the possibility. At first, it didn't seem like he took us very seriously—he seemed to think that we were another Sepulchre House, that we wouldn't be around for long. But he called us back less than a week later and said that he'd been thinking about it and wanted to do it.

It's probably safe to say that we've managed to win Dick over: he was very happy with how the book came out, and he's since approached us about doing another book. And it's likely that we will eventually do another book with Dick.

CD: You recently announced a new book: *Things To Do In Denver When You're Dead*, by Edward Bryant.

TSF: Again, we put together a short list of people that we'd like to publish, discussed the people on that list, and decided that Ed would be a great choice, since we really liked his stuff and he'd never had a full-length horror collection published.

We should also mention the story behind the title, since several people have asked us about it. We knew that Ed was a big fan of Warren Zevon—he's dedicated at least one story to him—and, in our minds at least, Ed is very much associated with the Denver area, where he lives. So we thought that borrowing the title of a Zevon song—*Things To Do In Denver When You're Dead*—tied in nicely. Ed's not completely sold on the idea, and the title may change, but for now it's the working title.

CD: What else do you have coming

out in the future?

TSF: We have *plans* for all sorts of stuff. What will actually come to pass is another matter. One thing that seems pretty probable—and we probably shouldn't talk about this because it's not 100% definite, but . . . oh well—is that we're going to do Dennis Etchison's next collection. More than likely, that will be our next book after the Bryant book.

What else . . . we also plan to do a series of reference books, under the sub-imprint Reference Shelf. These will likely be trade paperbacks with very small print runs. The idea with these isn't to make a whole lot of money—we'll probably be lucky to break even—but to put out some books that we, as readers, would love to see. In a way, these books will be an exten-

so forth.

We also have hopes of doing a second series of trade paperbacks, tentatively called New Voices, which will feature the work of newer people in the field. Books in this series could be first novels, or first collections by people who've had a novel or two published, or whatever—the general idea is that the authors are relatively new to the field. We've already got a couple of people in mind for this, but nothing definite. Of course, this is another idea that doesn't exactly have "commercial success" written all over it—it's a definite risk. But we're hoping that by choosing only high quality material and keeping the costs of the books down, that we can make it work.

And, of course, we'll continue on with the magazine. In fact . . .

we recently did a special magazine tribute to the 25th anniversary of *The Night of The Living Dead*—similar to an issue of *The Scream Factory* in a lot of ways, but not numbered as an issue—that did fantastically well for us. We'd like to continue to do one special magazine like this every year—next year, we're planning on doing a special magazine tribute to horror in the comics. And we'll keep doing regular issues of the magazine.

CD: How about chapbooks—do you plan to do any more books in that form?

TSF: Probably. We'd like to, and we're constantly batting around ideas for chapbooks, but the problem is . . . a lot of the chapbooks that we, as collectors, buy don't

seem all that impressive—it doesn't seem like you're getting a whole lot for your money. Roadkill does some nice stuff, and Crossroads did something interesting, although expensive, with their "art gallery" in the Lansdale chapbook they did, but overall it seems like a lot of chapbooks just aren't much to get excited about. And with our . . . tendency towards completeness, we tend to look at a possible chapbook and say, "Well, why do a little mini-collection of three or four stories? Why don't we add a bunch more stories and make it a real book?"

So yes, we'll probably do more chapbooks, but right now we can't seem to find the right project to get excited about.

CD: You've already mentioned that you planned on the magazine being non-fiction-oriented right from the start, but *why* do you choose to focus the magazine this way?

TSF: It's basically just a case where the non-fiction stuff is what we are really interested in—and the majority of our readers who have expressed opinions have indicated that they feel the same way. There are a fair amount of people out there who are interested in reading about the horror genre, and there's not that many places to read about it. *Necrofile* is a great little digest, but they take a much more academic slant than we do. *Tekeli-li* was also very interesting, but they're at best on a long hiatus, and at worst out of business. John Betancourt has his *Locus*-style horror news-magazine coming out beginning this month, but that's not really the same type of magazine that we are either. In fact . . . a recent review in *Locus* probably said it best when it described one of our issues as "popcorn culture to the max . . . manic, informative, and entertaining." That pretty much describes us.



sion of the magazine. There are three books in this series that we've got planned at this point: an annotated guide to *Weird Tales*, to be written by Stefan Dziemianowicz; an annotated guide to the *Alfred Hitchcock* anthologies, to be written by Peter and others; and an annotated guide to the Warren magazines—*Creepy*, *Eerie*, *Vampirella*, and

CD: Do you have anything special planned for future issues of the magazine?

TSF: We're going to continue to . . . *indulge* our tendency toward themed issues. Every odd-numbered issue will have a theme to it; even-numbered ones will have a more generic, or potpourri, approach. For example, number 13 will focus on science fiction/horror hybrids, and number 15 will be our special werewolf issue. Even the non-themed issues will have series of articles revolving around particular themes—for example, a series of articles about horror in various countries, like Australia, Canada, and England, as well as a series of articles on "genre cross-overs," starting with an article on fiction that features both western and horror motifs in number 14. We've also lined up some really great writers and artists for



upcoming issues, people like Everett Bleiler, Sam Moskowitz, Brian Stableford, Rob Latham, and Alan Clark.

CD: You've already talked about

what you want to do with the book line in the future—what are your long-term aspirations for the magazine?

TSF: There's an ideal-world answer to that question, and a more realistic answer. Realistically, we'd like to grow the magazine's circulation as high as we possibly can. We're pleased with the progress we've made so far in this area, since . . . we began really pushing to increase circulation as of issue #10, and in the course of four issues, we've gone from a circulation of only about 500 to over 2,000. Now, we've just gotta keep going in that direction. We want to keep improving with each issue—which we think we've done over the past four or five issues. And we would also like to be able to pay our contributors at a higher rate.

dp

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THE SCREAM FACTORY

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dp

CAT'S EYE

LARRY SEGRIF

LARRY SEGRIF is a friendly, multi-talented writer—he has written for anthologies in a variety of genres, including horror, suspense, science fiction, and fantasy—from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The following cross-genre tale marks Segriff's first story appearance in *Cemetery Dance*.

I watched them as he took her, my tail twitching with frustrated anger. He had entered her from the rear—"Cat fashion," I'd thought—and I couldn't tell if the sounds she was making were from pain or pleasure.

Leaping down from the bureau, I landed on the bed and cautiously approached. Closer, now, I could see the hot, silver tears glistening in her eyes and knew that she wasn't enjoying this. *The bastard*, I thought. *Who does he think he is? Marlon Brando?*

Stalking around them, I sniffed delicately at his pumping buttocks and wondered what she saw in him. Certainly his personal hygiene was nothing to write home about.

He noticed me then, though I would have thought he'd be oblivious to everything but his own sensations, and struck at me. I wasn't expecting it, and the blow flung me off the bed and into the wall. I heard her cry out, though whether from my pain or her own I couldn't tell, and I felt a flash of hatred stab through me before the shock sent me reeling back to myself.

☆ ☆

Slowly I raised my head from where it had sagged down onto my chest, and brought shaking hands up to massage my brow. Reading animals was hard enough; controlling them took even more out of me. I'd be quivering for hours, I knew, but it had been worth it.

I'd first discovered her only a few days ago. I'd been flying with a bird, enjoying the freedom of flight and, more importantly, the freedom from pain, when a small clearing had opened in the woods beneath us. The bird was a sparrow, not a hawk, so my eyesight wasn't that great, but I thought I saw something in that clearing that intrigued me. Exerting my will, I flew down for a closer look.

I was right. There was a small cabin nestled along one edge of the clearing with a well-kept lawn and a woman in a lounge. She was clearly sunbathing, and she was naked. Fluttering down to a table beside her, I spent some few moments enjoying the view.

It was then that I learned she had a cat.

I never saw it, but I felt something bat at me with incredible force, knocking me off the table and breaking one of my wings. A paw fell on me as soon as I hit the ground, snapping my spine, and a moment later I felt myself seized by a mouth full of needles.

"Percy!" She must have heard the one astonished twitter I'd managed, or perhaps she'd seen the flurry of murderous activity. "Bad cat! You drop that bird, Percy, right now!"

Surprisingly, the cat obeyed, but not before sinking its teeth into my belly and back.

I wished, then, that she hadn't interfered. Her intended kindness had turned into an act of cruelty. I was helpless—more so, even, than when I was myself—and dying.

She should have let Percy finish me. Even if he'd toyed with me first, it would have been quicker.

I stayed with the sparrow until the end, and it was a long time coming. It's a painful, soul-searing thing to share another's death, but I felt I owed it to the little bird. After all, it would never have been caught if I hadn't forced it down there.

When the drain opened up, that dark, sucking vortex that at times seems so inviting, I pulled away from my host. I could have gone straight into the cat, but I was tired and I'd lost the desire for sightseeing. Besides, he'd have the taste of my blood in his mouth, and I just wasn't up to sharing that.

I returned home, instead, to my palsied body and my mechanical bed, but I made a mental note of where this place was. I thought I might want to return, and soon.

I'd worn myself out more than I'd realized, however, and had a rather bad time of it for a while. It was several days before I felt strong enough to return, and when I did, he was there.

I had no idea who he was or why he was there, but

already I hated him. The way he treated her—hell, the way he treated me—fueled my anger. I spent less time recovering than I should have, and went back there that evening.

☆ ☆

"Oh, Percival, I'm so sorry."

She held me in her lap, running her fingers lightly along my fur. There was a deep rumble coming from my throat, even though an occasional heavier touch woke flashes of pain in my left side. Broken ribs, I realized, from his blow, and probably bruises on the other side from hitting the wall.

I could hear a shower running. "I don't know what came over him," she said, still gently stroking me. "He's usually so nice, but this afternoon . . ." Her voice trailed off as the water stopped.

She sighed. "I'd better go see if he wants anything." Setting me carefully on the floor, she eased out of her chair and walked rather stiffly across the living room.

He hurt her, too, I thought, anger flaring to new heights within me. Twisting my tail, I followed her into the bedroom.

He was just coming out of the adjacent bathroom, toweling himself off as he came. He was naked, and I had to admit I was impressed by his physique.

"What's the matter, hon?" he asked as he took the towel away from his hair and noticed her awkward gait.

She was in front of me so I couldn't see her face, but I heard the note of surprise as she repeated. "What's the matter? You were a little rough earlier, Terry, that's what's the matter."

He frowned, and even with my flattened, colorless vision I would have sworn the astonishment on his face was genuine. "I was? But I don't remem—"

He broke off then, right in the middle of a word, and his face changed. The frown fell away, replaced by a sly little smile, and I saw his manhood stir.

"Oh, yeah," he said, and even his voice was different: lower, rougher, and with a hint of mockery in it. "Admit it, Jess, you loved it."

"No," she started, and suddenly his left hand shot out and slapped her once, hard, across the face. Her head snapped back and his hand slipped down toward the front of her floral print dress. I heard a tearing sound, and saw her arms come up instinctively to cover herself, but he was having none of that. Pushing her backwards and onto the bed, he quickly twisted the damp towel into a sort of rope and used it to lash her wrists to the headboard.

Jesus, I thought. He's like a man possessed.

She was crying, a bit of blood leaking from her nose. He was sitting on her, fully aroused now, and had his hands on her naked breasts.

"No, stop," she sobbed, but he only grinned wider and squeezed harder.

My last thought hung in my head and understanding slowly dawned. *Like a man possessed.* It was hard for me to accept, although perhaps it shouldn't have been. The thing was, I'd been doing this for seven or eight years, ever since the onset of puberty brought both my gift and my curse, and in that time I'd never seen any indication that others could do this as well.

Until now.

Cautiously, I pulled away from the cat but caused my consciousness to remain. This was hard, almost as taxing as controlling another creature and far more difficult than just riding another's mind, but it was necessary. Slowly, then, and oh so carefully, I brought myself closer to Terry.

I didn't have to enter him to be sure. As I came up against the borders of his self, I could see the dark shadow that lay upon him. More, I could actually glimpse the silvery tether that bound this other telepath with his—I couldn't believe it could be a woman—own body. Worse, though, he sensed me as well.

Terry's head came up, a frown furrowing his brow and his eyes casting around. "What—" he began, and then his gaze fell on the cat. "You!" he said, a malicious grin twisting his lips.

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I was no longer attached to Percy, but the cat seemed to know something was wrong. He tried to flee the room, but as he stretched himself into that first long, running stride one of his broken ribs must have shifted within him. He jerked slightly and fell, and in another moment Terry was off the bed and had seized the cat by its neck.

I almost joined with Percy again. The strain of remaining disembodied was draining my strength rapidly and, like the sparrow of a few days ago, I felt I owed it to him. I didn't, though. Terry was searching his eyes, looking—I felt sure—for some sign of me. My hope was that, not finding any, he might let the cat go.

My hope was short lived. Without warning, the muscles along Terry's back and arms bunched. There was a sudden, sickening, snapping sound, and Percy went limp. He was dead, I knew, and Terry flung him into a corner.

Jess cried out, and I knew she'd witnessed the whole thing. My heart went out to her, and so did my self. Without actually willing it, I found myself joined with her.

"Easy, Jess," I murmured within her. I had never done this before, never even known that it was possible, but now that I was doing it I found that it was easy to maintain.

"Who are you?" Fortunately, she only thought the words. Terry was turning back to her, but it was only to resume what he'd started. He didn't seem aware that she had company as well.

"A friend," I replied, knowing that it was a woefully inadequate response. "Listen, Jess, I want you to know that it's not Terry who's doing these things. Another telepath, like me, is using him to do this to you. Do you understand, Jess? He probably won't even remember, later, what his body did."

She couldn't answer me right away. Terry had climbed back on top of her, straddling her stomach, and had just pinched her nipples viciously. Twin streaks of agony shot through her, taking all her thoughts and words away.

"Now, Jess," he whispered. "Let's have some fun."

I couldn't let it go on, but neither could I stop it. That one glimpse I'd gotten of the monster within him had showed me that it was stronger than me. Not that that was surprising. My power came from my mind, but the strength to wield it came from my body, and that twisted, painful shell I called home couldn't provide me with much.

He started to really hurt her, and my anger exploded within me. I started to pull out of Jess, but she clung to me with a desperate strength. In that moment, she almost came along, and I found myself wondering whether such a thing was possible. Could I take her, a non-telepath, back to my own body, say?

Could I find her a haven while her own physical self was being ravaged?

A wave of weakness hit me and I knew the answer was no. Maybe someone else could have. Maybe the telepath controlling Terry had that kind of strength, but I didn't.

"I'm sorry," I said to her. Her only reply was a wordless cry of anguish and despair. This time, when I pulled away, she didn't cling.

Disembodied once more, I hovered near the edge of that shadow, hunting for another glimpse of his lifeline. When it showed, I seized upon it, knowing that this was the moment of greatest danger.

He had to sense me; he must have felt my touch, but perhaps God was with me. More likely, though, Jess had somehow caught an echo of my half-formed plan. Either way, she moved beneath him just as his head started to come up, drawing his attention to her.

"Hold still, bitch," I heard him say and she cried out. Then I was gone, following his argent umbilical back to his lair.

His strength was awesome. My own line stretched behind me like a gossamer thread, but his was like a rope. It was too bad, really, that I couldn't cut that rope, but it was as immaterial as I was.

A second wave of weariness washed over me as I neared his home and I knew I was rapidly approaching my limits. If I didn't return to my own body soon, I never would. That thought almost sent me fleeing, but I could picture all too easily what was happening at that moment back at the cabin.

"Come on," I urged myself, "you're practically there. Don't give up now."

His house came into view and to my eyes it was a dark, brooding place. Set near some railroad tracks, it was in the seediest neighborhoods around, and this telepath's inner rage was suddenly easier to understand. Poor did not mean evil, I knew, but this part of town bred hopelessness and despair like our sewers bred rats.

He was lying in bed in near-total darkness, but I didn't need any light to see. As I hovered above him, I felt my compassion drain away, overcome by renewed rage. He was older, for one thing, maybe in his fifties or sixties, not the hormone-wracked teenager I'd envisioned. Certainly, he was old enough to be responsible for his actions. More than that, as far as I could tell he was healthy, and that was intolerable. Not that he had it easy, obviously. The room was hardly more than a closet and the whole house little more than a shack, yet I could sense the presence of maybe a dozen other people within its walls. Still, I couldn't help feeling fate had been kinder to him than to me. He got the gift without the curse. In whatever other unkind ways the deck was stacked against him, at least this wasn't his only hope of walking away from it. However slim his

chances, he'd had the potential to leave his troubles behind him.

Unlike me.

Yet here he was, not only escaping his own tortured life, but actually inflicting that same pain on others.

Another swell of fatigue, this one with an undertow the other had lacked, surged within me, but I refused to acknowledge it. Instead, I drifted closer and then merged with his empty shell.

The first thing I noticed was the smell, a horrid, fetid miasma of unclassifiable stinks. The second was the sound, a constant, almost physical combination of rats chattering in the dark, the snores and snuffles of too many sleepers in too small a space, and the eerie, haunting hoot of an approaching train. The third thing was the alarm, trilling along his silver lifeline and warning him that something was wrong.

If I was going to do something, it would have to be soon.

Sitting up, I looked around quickly, searching for anything I could use as a weapon. There was nothing. I didn't want to fight him off; that was never even a possibility. What I was trying to do was to find a way to kill his body, but nothing came to mind. Even the windows were useless, all boarded up and free of glass.

It hadn't been much of a plan, I knew, but its failure came as a blow. I tried to cheer myself up with the realization that it hadn't been a total loss. I'd learned where he lived. I could come back some other time, when I was stronger, and try again. Now, though, I had to leave, to get back to my body and recover.

Sorry, Jess.

I could feel him coming, his approach trumpeted along the silver cord, and I started to pull out. In that moment, a tremor passed along my own line and I knew it was too late. I was dying. I could go home if I chose, but I would never be coming back.

Ironically, unexpected strength suddenly poured into me. It was as if my body, aware that all was lost, had opened up the floodgates and given me its last reserves. "Take it," the gesture seemed to say: "Take it and do something."

"I will," I promised. Rising, still clad in this alien body, I fled into the night.

If I'd been stronger, if I'd had more practice with people, I might have tried to move into one of the sleepers. Surely one of them could have strangled this monster, but I didn't even consider it. Instead, I ran for the railroad tracks, and the approaching train.

I didn't make it.

I was still a good ten feet away when he burst upon me. The shock of it drove me to my knees. I tried to struggle against him, but he had too much experience with such things. In a matter of moments he was once more firmly in control of his body, and he had a lock

on me as well.

Pain washed over me, then, and for a moment I believed it was simply frustration over my defeat. I thought of Jess, and of Terry, and even of poor little Percival. "I'm sorry," I whispered, aiming it at them like a prayer.

He heard me, though, and misunderstood. "Yeah? Well, sorry ain't good enough, asshole, not by half. No, I think we'll just travel back along that little thread of yours and do to you what you were about to do to me."

The pain doubled and then doubled again, and I felt myself spasm within his grasp.

"Oh, no, you don't," he said, misinterpreting again, and tightened his hold. It was then that I felt the familiar sucking nibbling at the edges of myself and I knew what had just happened.

Smiling, albeit rather grimly, I reached out with the last of my strength. "All right," I answered him. "Let's go."

He still didn't understand, not until we pulled away from his body and he saw that enormous whirlpool waiting to take me. He released his grip on me then and tried to break mine, but like the tether it was not a physical thing. I held on.

A moment later and we were caught. He cried out, once, a long, despairing sound and then, just before the darkness claimed me, I thought I heard the purring of a cat.

— CD

IN THE COLD, DARK, DEAD OF WINTER, SOMETIMES IT'S COMFORTING TO CURL UP WITH SOMETHING GOOD TO READ.

You'll find plenty of nerve-wracking horror, fantasy, mystery, sci-fi, and even a vampire or two, in the Fall/Winter '93 issue of

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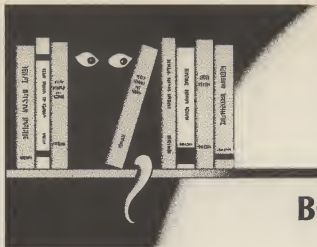


Our October issue has exciting fiction and features, including: an excerpt from Lois Tilton's novel, *Darkness on the Ice*; book reviews by Neal Hawes, and short fiction by Scott Thomas, Steve Rasnic Tem, Nancy Kilpatrick, and many more of our favorite writers. Also in this issue, a Special Holiday Supplement, with Yuletide Tales of Terror from J.N. Willamson. We're offering the special, pre-publication gift of a free back issue when you use the coupon below, so you can reserve copies of this issue in advance, and get a little something extra at the same time. (A *Dead of Night* subscription makes a great holiday gift, and we'll send the gift card for you!)

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BOOK REVIEWS

We're all familiar with—and probably jaded by—bad writers either novelizing bad movies, or simply writing bad novels that are watered-down prose versions of films that should never exist. But what happens when good, literate, novelists take a whack at fictive structures we're all probably more familiar watching on medium-sized screens at suburban multiplexes?

I realize I have to be careful how I phrase this. I wouldn't want you to think I was suggesting that *Shadowman* (Dell Abyss, \$4.99, 354pp), the most recent of Dennis Etchison's all too rare ventures into novel-writing was just another knock-off pop exploitation. It's certainly not that. Yet it borrows a tried-and-true dramatic structure every slasher movie devotee of the last twenty years would recognize.

Let us not forget that Dennis Etchison—or his writer alter ego Jack Martin—wrote the novelizations of John Carpenter's *The Fog* as well as one of the *Halloween* movies. Jack Martin has, of course, also appeared as the protagonist of a number of Etchison's short stories and he's a primary character in *Shadowman*. I've started to think of

old Jack as something like the Jerry Cornelius of dark fantasy. The connections here between character and author are complex and mysterious indeed.

At any rate, Dennis Etchison is a tremendously accomplished writer and editor who knows both his cultural history and keenly surveys what popular culture's doing



today. *Shadowman* has, on one level, a straight-forward thriller plot. We're in Shadow Bay, a small northcoast California town with a grim history of kids vanishing. After a hiatus, the disappearances start up again, and then some bodies—and body-parts—are found.

Hysteria grows. A stone killer's on the prowl. All Etchison's primary characters start to interact. Artist Jack Martin's on hand, glumly trying to sever all ties with his alienated wife, Leanne. He meets Lissa, a woman dealing with disturbed children, and finds himself attracted. A gang of boys, horror movie devotees all, starts to check things out in Shadow Bay, little knowing how deep over their heads they're getting. It's a tightly-wound community, tightly controlled, but the thin layers of reality start to peel away not so much like the strata of an onion, but more like a succession of skin slices from deep paper cuts. And yes, there is a remorseless, apparently unstoppable killer out there, a man with no face and a very sharp knife.

And, of course, all the characters are on a collective collision course with extremely nasty consequences for some. Etchison's story embodies the feeling of the cold fog that haunts Shadow Bay and Eden Cove. There are times when he seems remorselessly oblique in his storytelling, yet everything eventually comes around and locks into place. And there are plenty of plot surprises. And things do get

weirder, the closer we get to the climax of the novel. The author keeps the ambiguity generator going on emergency power, making sure we're never too sure if the man with no face is purely human or not, or whether the occasional manifestations of psychic powers are legit.

The structure, the effect, is that of a highly accomplished film director taking the helm of a slasher movie, and giving it all the gloss and content and legitimacy of a mainstream film. But the touches are still there, including some that may or may not be deliberate. When a litany of missing and murdered kids is articulated, the first two names cried out are Jason and Michael, the given names of the antiheroes of the *Friday the 13th* and the *Halloween* flicks. And the final anticlimax is a

hallmark of so many, many horror films—I dare not be more specific. But hey, this isn't intended to be an M.A. examination.

Suffice it to say that Dennis Etchison's *Shadowman* is chilly and highly accessible, and it's another nail in the empty coffin awaiting the dying golden dream of California.

In *Wet Work* (Jove, \$4.99, 262pp), Philip Nutman has spun a novel off an even more apparent cinematic model. Ever since George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* back in the late 'sixties, flesh-eating zombies have shamblered through an enormous number of good, bad, indifferent (but mostly pretty awful) movies. These haven't been the vacant-eyed oppressed victims of Val Newton films; nope, Romero gave us the dweebish but driven (by insatiable hunger for brains—sort of like a *Wizard of Oz* character) revenants who can be destroyed only with a solid brain trauma themselves. They haunt graveyards, besiege isolated farmhouses, and hang out at malls. And they lust to devour the living. Metaphorically they correspond, at least in Romero's Platonic ideal of zombie movies, to America's great unwashed (and howl) consumer hordes.

In John Skipp and Craig Spector's original zombie anthology, *Book of the Dead*, Nutman's short story version of *Wet Work* suggested that if the zombie effect should permeate Washington's political arena and intelligence community, very little would differ. Cannibalistic zombies would make the transi-

tion from metaphor to literal fact, but so what else is new, right? "Wet Work" held a cruel and wicked insight into political reality. And it suggested so much more about its feral world. So the author yielded to the temptation to explore his scenario through considerable expansion. With mixed results.

Wet Work is told with enormous sardonic gusto. Verve, even. I was intrigued by the triumph of Nutman's American vernacular. The author is British, but you'd never know it from this book. That's not an easy effect to bring off, but Nutman does it with great skill in the construction of a North American voice.

Nutman resurrects (literally) his CIA killer, Dominic Corvino. Corvino's not such a bad sort, an ethical assassin who's closing in on burnout after a couple decades of murdering for his country. At the beginning of *Wet Work*, Corvino finds himself caught up in a bloody operation gone completely balls-up in Panama City. Even as the baleful green spectre of Comet Saracen hangs in the Central American night sky, all sorts of things go hideously wrong with a raid against the Cali drug cartel and some rogue DEA agents. Corvino is betrayed, his lover is flayed alive, and he is mightily pissed by the whole proceedings.

In the meantime, back in Washington, young Nick Packard



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is about to start his stint as a D.C. cop. Nick's got a living wife and a real problem with alcohol. And he's about to gain additional problems he could never have dreamed of as the cometary influence starts to raise the dead. Author Nutman's rules are pretty liberal and not always consistent. Some of the dead come back as intelligent, conscious entities who just have a few little emotional (and dietary) kinks to work out. Additionally he throws in a virus that starts killing multitudes and keeps them sufficiently dead so they don't come back as zombies. The inconsistent (I think) story rules on this one kept confusing me. Or maybe it was the odd mold on the three-day-old pork sandwich I was eating at the time.

Nutman tries to flesh out (as it were) his decaying civilized world with a number of vignettes that usually work better as gross-out episodes than as illuminations. As the parallel narratives of Corvino and Nick slowly start to converge, as virtually every character dies either temporarily or permanently, the story never quite jells as a novel. There are lots of great pieces, but the entirety of Nutman's epic premise never seems to come quite into focus. Parts is parts, and that's pretty much what they remain. The author does great violence and good bleakness, and Dominic Corvino, in particular, is a tremendously involving character. But *Wet Work* tends to remain an impressive collection of effects rather than a unified whole. Never mind the consistent misspelling of Ingram (as in the MAC-10 automatic weapon) or the Book of Revelation. Nor the peculiar alternate history prediction. In this novel, George Bush won reelection to the Presidency and gets a sound (and, I think, totally deserved) drubbing from the author.

This book has a stellar display of blurbs from such as Stephen King, Clive Barker, Kathe Koja,

and, um, Shaun Hutson. When they laud the ability and promise of the author they're dead-on. If all goes well, Nutman's second novel will demonstrate that the whole can be greater than the sum of the parts. I await it with undimmed enthusiasm.

She's ba-a-ack.

Yes, the inimitable Cheri Scotch has returned with a sequel to last year's delightful lycanthropic confection, *The Werewolf's Kiss*. The current installment in Scotch's chronicling of werewolf history in general and that of the werewolves of Louisiana in particular, is again packaged and labeled as a romance by its publisher. Those of you who are intellectual snobs or are otherwise too finicky to be caught dead picking up something masquerading as a generic pop-market bodice-ripper should hire someone to pick you up a copy of this novel. Hmm, now that I think about it, though, *The Werewolf's Touch* (Diamond, \$4.99, 260pp) is a bodice-ripper. Also a heart, chest, and ribcage-ripper. No shame in that.

But I do want to remind you that it's a heck of a lot more than the stereotype you might expect from the cover illustration and the title. And what *will* the third title be, after "kiss" and "touch"? The imagination runs riot.

The Werewolf's Touch is actually something of a prequel to the first volume, tracing, as it does, the story of the Marley family curse. Andrew Marley is the contemporary clergyman who was depicted in *The Werewolf's Kiss* as a highly reluctant lycanthrope, steadfastly refusing his supernatural nature, either as gift or burden. The novel also backtracks to the late nineteenth century and gives us a good look at Blanche Pitre, the ambitious white-trash girl who becomes Marie Laveau's most accomplished Voodoo student and eventually undergoes a horrific transfiguration

tion to la Reine Blanch, the stunning but monstrous White Queen. It's all great fun, undergirded with a good sense of New Orleans back-ground and bayou lore.

The ride never stops. We meet familiar characters from the first novel, and encounter a variety of new ones. Scotch's stitchery of the two dovetailing books works pretty well. It's not Lawrence Sanders' *Alexandria Quartet*, but, hey, so what? Laissez les bon temps rouler.

In this new book, author Scotch beats the sophomore curse. It's actually told with a much more surer narrative hand than its predecessor; sufficiently so that I think few readers of *The Werewolf's Kiss* will be deeply upset that some of the suspense has been necessarily drained off by the series' structure.

Really, what Scotch has whipped up is a dessert that makes a person think of a current of rich, dark chocolate, semisweet, winding through a mound of rich marshmallow creme; all set on a base of crunchies that are just sharp enough to suggest the sort of bite that tells you its there, but doesn't break the skin.

So is Cheri Scotch the Anne Rice of werewolves? Well, not quite yet in terms of mastery of prose, but pretty close. She grasps the sensuality of her subject matter, and does very well with the revolutionary (for contemporary horror) notion that sexual love is an essentially good and positive and powerful thing that her characters enjoy, even the villainous ones. These novels are romantic and melodramatic, to be sure, but they're also humane. And that's a nice accomplishment in a dark fantasy. I'm definitely looking forward to further installments of cross-spliced lycanthropic history, mixed richly with Voodoo, Hecate, and lous garous of Bayou Goula.

SHORT TAKES

Bestsellers Guaranteed (Ace, \$4.50, 207pp) is something a bit odd. It's an omnibus paperback containing the 15 tales in *Joe R. Lansdale's Stories by Mama Lansdale's Youngest Boy* from Pulphouse's Author's Choice Monthly series, along with "The Events Concerning a Nude Fold-Out Found in a Harlequin Romance," a novella published in the anthology, *Dark at Heart*. I've reviewed both volumes previously and found each well worth recommending; but it seemed a good idea to mention this current recombinant mutation. Don't be fooled by the cover painting, a whimsical Mark Ferrari depiction of a literate dragon draped over his hoard of leather-bound tomes, or by the fantasy rubric on the spine. This ain't no high fantasy lite. It's a first-rate retrospective, particularly of Lansdale's earlier career. There's a fair amount of tough-minded crime fiction here, notably the sublimely nasty "The Job," a short and savage look at immigrants, economic warfare, murder, and Elvis impersonators. The fantasy's present too, but it's not exactly the elf-and-dragon variety. "Not From Detroit" is a poignant account of an elderly couple dealing with Mr. Death, a story that would do credit to Matheson or Bradbury. "The Events Concerning . . ." demonstrates Lansdale's strong suit, whacked-out humorous melodrama with a distinctive voice (East Texas) and a keen sense of place (ditto). If the idea of an unemployed aluminum chair fabricator and his precocious teenaged daughter joining forces with the crusty woman proprietor of a used

paperback store to catch a fiendish serial killer sounds promising, it becomes much more than that. The author's spiffed up his introduction and story notes to reflect this latest avatar of the contents. Buy this book swiftly; I suspect the terribly misleading cover is going to doom the portentously titled *Bestsellers Guaranteed* to a sad irony, an undeservedly short shelflife in bookstores.

Dennis Cooper is the highly disturbing writer of *Frisk*. His latest work, *Jerk* (Artscape, \$15.00, 55pp), is sort of an upscale equivalent of the sorts of chapbooks Stan Tal is packaging over at TAL Publications. *Jerk* is really a collaborative work, plaiting its rictus grin of a narrative around photographs of eerily grotesque puppet constructions by Nayland Blake. Cooper's story is based on the confessions of David Brooks, one of serial killer Dean Corll's young henchmen. With another teenager, Brooks and Corll used to torture and kill a variety of young men and bury the bodies underneath the boathouse. *Jerk* combines straightforward narrative, psychodrama, and theatrical staginess to present a nastily manic portrait of homicidal madness. The author's primary conceit is to suggest a time when an older David Brooks is presenting a puppet theater version of events at the end of Corll's and his killing career, and that the audience includes an undergraduate class in "Freudian Psychology Refracted Through Post-Modern Example." As coda to Brooks' riff is an all too accurately couched "term paper" on the puppet show by one of the observing students. Puppet-maker Blake's artistry is both beautiful and disturbing. The book itself is

a cleverly designed artifact from San Francisco's Artspace Books. It's a slim hardback, just the right proportions to recall everybody's favorite old Little Golden Books and, indeed, on the inside front board there's a red-bordered "this book belongs to" box waiting to be filled in. Chilly and evil, and the perfect gift for just the right person.

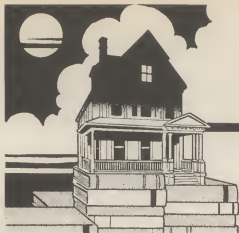
Claudia O'Keefe's debut as an anthology editor proves out well with the first volume of *Ghosttide* (Revenant Books, \$12.50, 221pp). This trade paperback starts with an attractive wraparound cover by Alan Clark and includes 15 stories. Gahan Wilson's "The Power of the Mandarin" and "Iron Mask" by Robert Bloch are reprints, but there's plenty of new material from such as Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, Dave Smeds, Susan Palwick, Kathryn Ptacek, and a variety of others. There is some silly stuff in here, along with some quite accomplished new fiction. The tone of the book covers dark fantasy and suspense, and more frequently than I suspect mere chance would dictate, incorporates a pleasantly black sense of humor. Tavish MacMinn is a new writer whose "The Ghosts of Mice and Bugs" spins off of city cats being haunted by just what the title suggests. David J. Schow's "Penetration" adroitly manages to join love and violence in a surprising new way. Offprints would make great Valentine's cards for both NRA enthusiasts and Brady Bill advocates. I hope *Ghosttide* prospers and continues. It's establishing a new voice in the field without attempting to slide by via cloning its competition.

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KATHRYN
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ANTHOLOGY ATTIC

Before I get into the review, I need to make an apology. In one of my earlier columns, I mixed up names and put in the wrong name. In the review of *Dracula: Prince of Darkness* I said that "The Black Wolf" was written by Wendi Lee and Terry Brooks. Terry's last name is Beatty, and I knew that, and for some reason I typed Brooks in. Terry is a talented writer and comics person, and I'm sorry I screwed up his name. Thanks to Wendy for pointing that out to me.



Cat Crimes (Martin H. Greenberg and Ed Gorman, editors; Ivy Books; Ivy Books-Ballantine; 260 pages; \$3.99; ISBN 0-8041-0979-6).

This is an older book, first published in '91, but my Ballantine edition is June '92, and it took me some time to get this copy from the publisher. Why, I don't know.

I'm going to stop right now and talk about review copies and publishers. When I was beginning this column 'way back when, I faxed a number of companies for copies of the latest anthologies (I had specific ones in mind). I also asked to be put on their list for mysteries, thrillers, etc.

Weeks later when only one or two books had trickled in with

most not being the one's I'd requested, I faxed the publishers again. And again. Finally I started receiving books on an almost regular basis. Why there was such a long time, I don't know. I do know that from time to time, I have to nudge the publishers (or the publicity departments, I guess).

So, authors and would-be authors, pay attention here. If you think your publisher is going to automatically (as in, no nudging from you) drown reviewers with copies of your latest work, think again. If you wonder why you haven't been getting reviews . . . well you may know why now. This is something you can't just sit back and "let happen." It's something you have to make happen. If you have a book coming out and you want it to go to some particular magazines and reviewers, then send that list to the publicity person of your publisher. Be sure to follow up with a letter or a phone call. And I would also recommend that if you don't see a review in advance of the book's publication (as happens most times), then give the magazine a call to see if they got the review copy. If not, then call your publisher and ask that another be sent (say that it must have gotten lost in the mail. Never be rude to your publisher.), and thank them profusely.

Anyway, on to the cat mystery book.

Cats figure into the stories in many ways, as you might have imagined from the title. In some tales the cat is virtually a character; in others, it just walks through, as it were. Cats have long been associated with mystery or horror, and a linking of them with mystery stories is very natural. I mean, I can't exactly imagine a "Parakeet Crimes" anthology, although it might be done someday.

Bill Pronzini contributes "Bedeviled: A 'Nameless Detective' Story." I have to admit that I've never read the Nameless Detective stories, but on the strength of this story, I want to read more. It's a story about an old lady, her neighbor, and a cat, of course.

Joan E. Hess's "A Weekend at Lookout Lodge" is the droll story of Ed Curry and his new wife, who have returned to the very lodge where his previous wife died. Miss Doris, Miss Lydia, and Miss Eleanor contribute to the drollness.

"Horatio Ruminates" is a fine story by Dorothy B. Hughes told from the point of view of the cat. I really enjoyed "Blindsided" by William J. Reynolds. The narrator played for the Kansas City Royals, but due to an injury had to retire; he lives in an old theatre with his

cats. A woman he knows from school days is killed and . . . well, I'd like to read more about these same characters and more by this fine writer.

Bill Crider has a Dan Rhodes story in "Buster," the tale of an old woman's dead cat. Rhodes figures there has to be more to this than the simple death of a cat, and he's right. "Little Cat Feet" by Les Roberts is about a Hollywood p.i., an old-time movie star and . . . cats. Louise Manaster reports a theft, and Saxon responds to her call, but finds out there's more than thievery involved.

John Lutz's "Finicky" is short and very very nasty. I guessed about it almost from the beginning, but that didn't mean it lost its effectiveness.

Others who contributed stories were: Peter Lovesey, Jon L. Breen, Barbara Paul, Christopher Fahy, David H. Everson, Douglas Borton, J.A. Jance, Gene DeWeese and Barbara Paul, Barbara D'Amato, Barbara Collins.

Anthology News:

The Ultimate Zombie and *The Ultimate Witch* will be published by Dell this October. *Confederacy of the Dead* was recently released by NAL Roc. *Phobias* will be out this autumn or winter from Pocket Books as well. George Hatch starts reading for *Eclipse of the Senses* in September; this is a part of the *Noctulpa* series. I also just received a copy of *Narrow Houses*, the English anthology, and I'm reading along in that. I'm going to try to get hold of more Canadian and English anthologies. I'll let you know what happens.

There are lots of anthologies open right now. I've got numerous of them listed in my market newsletter. Not all are horror/mystery ones, of course, but a large number of them are. So, look for the reviews here . . . some day.

That's all for now. If you have any suggestions for anthologies to take a look at (you have a favorite from years past you'd like others to know about, heard about one about to be published, haven't seen one reviewed in these hallowed—or is that hollowed?—pages), drop me a postcard (PO Box 97, Newton NJ 07860; fax: 201-579-6441).

For those folks who sent me anthologies a while ago: I'm still working on 'em. Things are going much much slower these days; I have a full-time outside job now, in addition to writing and publishing the monthly *The Gila Queen's Guide to Markets*, and so everything is . . . backed up, you might say (which is one of the reasons this column is a tad shorter than usual). Eventually, I'll get to all this stuff. I hope.

The next column will be on who knows what. In the meantime, keep reading.



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Greetings from THE TIME TUNNEL

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HACELDAMA

GARY A. BRAUNBECK

GARY A. BRAUNBECK — and I've said this many times before — is one of the most promising young talents this field has to offer. "Haceldama" is darkly brilliant and is Gary's fifth appearance in *Cemetery Dance*.

"Thus let me live, unseen, unknown,
Thus unlamented let me die;
Steal from the world, and not a stone
Tell where I lie."

—Alexander Pope
Ode on Solitude (1717)

tell me, my torturer, did you ever think i would
last this long?
of course not.
i wonder how they would react if they knew the
truth.
oh well. the traditor papilio waits.
time to begin. yet again.

1

The customers in the truck stop restaurant paid no attention to the man until he started shooting.

Everyone moved at once, running for doors, throwing themselves under tables, grabbing the loved ones with them or calling the names of those they'd never see again: all were silenced by the cold, contemptuous crack of rattlegun racket.

A dog sat immersed in the unreason of the rainy midnight outside watching blood bloom on the windows.

Five minutes later the man came out.
The dog looked up.

A bloodied hand rested on its head.

"Patience, my friend," said a deep, sepulchral

voice.

The grieving howl of an approaching siren echoed from the distance. The dog whirled around, baring its teeth.

"Easy, boy. Here."

The dog accepted what was placed between its teeth.

"Remember, don't eat this. See you soon."

It looked toward the direction of the siren. When it turned back, the man had disappeared into unreason and the rain.

2

Five hours later, as the sun perched above the hills like a vulture examining a field of fresh carrion, Detective Ben Littlejohn stood shivering in a corner of the blood-smeared restaurant and sipped lukewarm coffee from a thermos. The bodies had been examined, counted, and hauled away, the rifle lay on the counter in an evidence bag, and three wallets plus one purse (which equals four missing bodies, he thought) were neatly arranged on a nearby table.

He glanced up and saw Captain Al Goldstein in the doorway. "I keep thinking about the guy who walked into that McDonald's in California."

"The 'I'm-going-to-hunt-humans' guy?"

"Yeah. I remember seeing this picture of a cop kneeling over the body of a little boy who was splayed against a bicycle. The kid's hand was reaching out and you could see the hand of another person outside camera range reaching toward him. I always wondered if that was the kid's mother, if she'd been trying to get to him in those last few seconds."

"I remember that picture, too. I think *The New York Post* ran it. The cop was crying."

Ben rubbed his sore neck. "Can't say I blame him."

Goldstein offered Ben a cigarette. "I hate to sound crass—not that my personality is all that sparkling to begin with—but you have other worries. I've got people trying to track down that partner of yours but—"

"We should leave Bill alone. He and Eunice haven't had a vacation in years."

"I know, but the mayor and the chief have been reaming my ass over not having enough qualified personnel to put on this. When I reminded them about the new budget cuts they gave me one of those 'So what?' looks." He lowered his voice. "I managed to get us thirty-six hours to come up with something before the governor calls in the FBI."

The sudden burst of a flashbulb lanced into Ben's eyes; reporters had been outside for three hours, snapping pictures, scrambling for interviews, broadcasting live from the scene for the early-bird breakfast crowd. None had yet been allowed inside the truck stop.

Goldstein glanced out the window. "I heard something about a dog?"

"It had a note in its mouth. It walked up to the first two guys on the scene and dropped it at their feet."

"Which unit?"

"Sanderson and Wagner. It went for Sanderson's throat and they had to shoot it. They left about five minutes ago. Body's in the trunk of their cruiser."

"Let me see the note."

Ben reached into his pocket and, using a pair of tweezers, took the note from its plastic evidence bag.

Goldstein fished through his own pockets, then grunted in disgust. "Shit! I don't have my glasses. D'you mind?"

"You're gonna just love this," said Ben, then began to read: "'Hannibal crossed the Alps with one of the greatest armies in history. He arrived at the outer gates of Rome and Rome was in his hands. At the outer gates he stopped, then went back. What made him stop?'"

"That it?"

"No. On the reverse side are the lyrics to 'Don't Get Around Much Anymore.' You haven't asked me about the bodies yet."

"How many were there?"

"That depends. The killer took the time to lay a piece of identification on each victim. The nine bodies in here matched their identification but—" He pointed to the wallets and purse "—we have no corpses for these. So the total is either nine or thirteen, depending on how you want to look at it."

"How could—?"

"That's not even the good part." Ben's hands began to shake. "No one was shot in the head. No one. The killer walked in here, sprayed the place with an AK-47, and not one person gets it in the head."

"You think it was deliberate?"

"Had to be. He didn't want to damage the faces. He wanted us to be able to identify the bodies quickly." He took a deep breath; when he spoke again his voice was thin and hollow and the words came out in a rapid cadence: "He tore out everyone's eyes. We couldn't find them anywhere. Then he jammed coins into the empty sockets and stapled everyone's eyelids to their foreheads. Wait until you see the pictures; all those bodies with wide silver eyes staring up at the ceiling, reflecting the light . . ."

" . . . must've been horrible."

"It looked almost comical! I didn't know whether to laugh or vomit or dance a jig. Hannibal crossing the Alps. 'Don't Get Around Much Anymore.' I'm surprised he didn't ask how much wood would a wood-chuck chuck if—"

"That's enough."

"Sorry." He finished his cigarette. "I never thought we'd see something like this."

Goldstein put a hand on Ben's arm. "I'll finish up here, talk to the reporters and such. You go home. Take a shower, rest up. One hour. I want you in my office by seven."

Ben started toward the door, then turned and said, "You know something else about that 'I'm-going-to-hunt-humans' guy? The morning after it happened, our McDonald's here had its busiest day ever. Go figure."

only seventeen hundred days this time?

you're getting unreasonable in your old age, my torturer. they died nobly.

i see.

not that nobly. so.

only seventeen hundred days this time.

youirs will be done.

and fuck you, too.

3

Instead of his apartment Ben went to the cemetery by the old County Home to clear his head. It was a sad, pathetic place, but he'd felt a kinship with it since his high school days when he'd worked part-time as the caretaker's assistant, helping to maintain the grounds and bury the residents or unidentified homeless whose bodies were dumped here by the county. It had been pretty once. He tried to remember that.

The home had burned down in 1970 and the cemetery fell to neglect and decay. Now the bodies were known only by the numbers sloppily engraved on their chipped, broken headstones: 107, 122, 135, and so on. There was a certain morbidity to coming here

but come here he did, if only to remind himself that there were worse things than being a widower and in debt up to your ass at age thirty-five—among other things. A few solitary minutes with the nameless dead and suddenly a recurring bad dream and lonely bed didn't seem so cataclysmic.

He wandered through the weeds, used condoms, and broken beer bottles, looking at the markers.

76 . . . 85 . . . 93 . . .

There was no need for him to look, though; he knew the layout by heart, could probably even recite the numerical patterns in his sleep.

This'll be all of us someday, he thought. Sure, there would be mourners at the end, friends, family, old lovers you thought had forgotten about you, maybe a girl you had a crush on in ninth grade, and they would gather, and they would weep, and they would talk among themselves afterward and say, "I remember the way he used to . . ." Your belongings would be divided, given away, or tossed on a fire, your picture moved to the back of a dusty photo album, and, eventually, those left behind would die too, and no one would be left to remember your face, your middle name, even the location of your grave. The seasons would change, the elements would set to work, rain and heat and cold and snow would smooth away the inscription on the headstone until it was no longer legible and then, later—days, weeks, decades—someone who happened by would glance down, see the faded words and dates, mutter "I wonder who's buried here," then go on about their business. No one would be left to say that this man was important, or this woman was kind, or that anything they strove for was worthwhile.

He thought then of Cheryl, his wife, and the lovely spot in Cedar Hill Cemetery where her grave was. He swallowed twice, very hard, not wanting to remember the night she and their son had died. Ben had been thirty-two and just promoted to Detective. It should have been the beginning of a better life for them.

Should have been.

He wondered how many of the forgotten dead surrounding him had built their life on the unstable foundation of what Should Have Been.

A few feet away, perched on the jagged remains of a headstone, was a black butterfly. It wasn't its color that attracted Ben's gaze but its stillness; its wings did not so much as flutter in the breeze. As he knelt down to get a better look (Cheryl had loved butterflies) Ben saw that it wasn't entirely black; a thin strip of white encircled its body at an area just below the antennae. It almost looked like—he chuckled under his breath at the absurdity of the thought—a very tiny animal collar.

He froze a moment. Something about this butterfly was familiar.

His left eye twitched. He pressed on it with his finger. It stopped. He leaned closer and blew on the

butterfly's wings—

—but they did not move. Not even a fraction of an inch.

He looked at the headstone:

EMILY SUE MODINE

Beloved wife of Henry Modine

Mother to William and Patricia

Born Sept. 3, 1993 Taken July 13, 1960

He stared unbelieving, blinked to make sure he wasn't seeing things, then walked the entire cemetery again.

4

Goldstein looked up from the preliminary lab report and said, "One more time?"

"There are fifteen brand new headstones out at the old County Home cemetery. I know that place by heart, I go walking out there all the time, and those things weren't there last week. The cemetery hasn't been used since the Home burned down."

"Any of the names on the headstones match those of the victims?"

"No."

"So? There are six more headstones than we have bodies and—don't look at me like that, okay? I agree it seems like more than coincidence but the mayor and the chief are going to want something more solid."

"What's the lab say?"

"There were no prints on the note, the coins, or the rifle. No serial number on the AK-47, no skin fragments, blood, saliva, nothing."

"What about the coroner?"

"Before ten, I'm told." Goldstein stood and began straightening his tie. "Let's go. Mayor wants to see us in ten minutes."

The door flew open and the desk sergeant rushed in. "Sorry, sir, but a call just came in. Two officers down."

"Jesus. Who?"

"Number 19. Sanderson and Wagner."

Ben saw Goldstein's face go pale, but when he spoke his voice was tight and steady; grace under pressure.

"I want every available unit out there."

"But—"

"Now."

"The caller said they were dead."

Their throats had been clawed open, their eyes torn out, their eyelids stapled to their foreheads, and Kennedy fifty-cent pieces jammed into the bloody eye sockets.

Sanderson's torso had somehow been pushed through the windshield and lay against the hood; Wagner had been pulled from behind with such force that the seat was wrenched off its track.

A large hole had been ripped through the back seat, enabling Ben to see into the trunk.

"Oh, Christ," he whispered. "The dog."

"What?" shouted Goldstein, trying to supervise the placing of roadblocks and barricades. It looked as if every cop in the city were there, all of them shocked, angry, and yelling at everyone or anything. To the best of Ben's knowledge a cop in Cedar Hill had never before been killed in the line of duty.

"The dog," he whispered again.

Goldstein said, "So where the hell is it?"

As the paramedics took the bodies away, Ben stopped a uniformed officer and asked if he or anyone in the neighborhood had seen a large gray dog in the past thirty minutes; the officer shook his head.

Goldstein pulled Ben aside. "Is it possible the dog wasn't dead, only wounded? Maybe—"

A paramedic shouted, "Captain! Over here!"

They ran over to the ambulance and climbed in back.

"What is it?"

The paramedic put on latex gloves and gestured for them to do the same, then pulled back the sheet and pointed toward the mangled glob of meat and cartilage that had been Sanderson's throat. "Something's been jammed in there."

Digging the tweezers from his pocket (*like you expect there to be fingerprints this time*), Ben retrieved the object, carefully working the rolled note from inside the plastic bag.

"Well?"

"It says: 'I think the Hannibal question is a little beyond you, so try this one: Why does the dogwood have three red spots? You might ask Emily Modine that one, or even Mozart, if you can find his grave. The city of Vienna has been looking for it for almost two centuries.'"

Goldstein leaned forward and put his face in his hands. "And the other side?"

"The lyrics to 'Imagine.'"

Goldstein exhaled and sat up straight. His composure was almost frightening. "Twenty years I've been a cop and in all that time the worst we've ever had to deal with were those .22 calibre killings a few years back. Took us two weeks to track down those crankheads. A turf war. Boy, was the chief disap-

pointed. He thought we had a bonafide serial killer on our hands; headlines, his picture on the front page." A small sneer appeared on his face, then just as quickly vanished. "Looks like we got one now." He rubbed his eyes. "Sanderson and his wife were gonna have a baby soon."

Ben closed his eyes and thought: *... were gonna have a baby ... a baby ... we're gonna have a baby, Ben! God, I love you ...*

"Okay," said Goldstein. "This is the first concrete link we've got between the killings and the headstones at the cemetery. That'll give us some weight."

"We still have four bodies missing from the truck stop."

"I can add and subtract, thank you. I'm going back to the station and see if the coroner's report is in yet. I'll send two units to search the cemetery grounds. You head out there and wait for them."

Ben reached up and massaged his neck.

he's thinking about his dream again. i know. i'm the one who sent it to him.

yes, my torturer. i found another one.

and there's not a thing you can do about it.

is there?

not without finally giving me mercy.

and you can't have that, can you?

Ben's radio squawked at him as soon as he climbed into his car. The dispatcher gave him a number to call and said it was an emergency.

He snatched up the car phone and punched in the number.

They answered on the first ring. "Ben? This is Monsignor Maddingly at St. Francis de Sales on Granville Street." Ben had known Maddingly for most of his life—in fact, Maddingly had baptized him. "Could you get over here right away? I know you've got your hands full right now but ... please, Ben. Believe me, it's urgent. And don't use the siren. You won't want to draw attention to this."

Maddingly was waiting in front of the church. Ben joined him and they walked up to the large double oak doors that led inside.

"Our cleaning lady found them," said Maddingly, opening the doors.

Even from where he stood—some twenty yards away—Ben could see the two bodies hanging by their necks from beams above the altar, bookends to the solid-gold crucifix that hovered in the center.

Ben and Maddingly approached slowly, the echo of their footsteps bouncing eerily off the stained-glass windows depicting saints and prophets in solemn, multi-colored meditation.

Both bodies were naked and had evacuated their bowels on the altar; the sickening, cumulative stench of piss, excrement, and incense made Ben's stomach turn.

He stared up at the bodies and saw the deep, bloody scratch marks on their throats; frenzied marks, proof of panic, as if they'd been trying to—

"Oh God," he whispered. "They were still alive."

A soft shaft of sunlight resolved into a solid beam as it passed through the stained-glass eyes of the Virgin Mary and reflected brightly from the silver coins which replaced the eyes of both corpses.

A glob of piss-soaked excrement dripped from the leg of one body and splattered with a soft *ping!* against the rim of a silver chalice positioned in the center of the altar.

The chalice was filled to overflowing with human eyes and their still-attached stalks.

Covering his mouth and stepping to the altar, Ben saw the letters scribbled in shit on the white silk cloth which covered the marble:

DAMA

"Do you know what this means?" he asked Maddingly. "Is it part of something Latin?"

"Not that I can recall. But I'll check, I promise you." Ben was impressed by the Monsignor's outward calm. He stepped down and led Maddingly toward the sacristy. "You'll have to move all Masses for at least the next couple of days."

"I figured as much. Just let me say a few more prayers over the bodies before you call this in."

Ben nodded, and for some reason felt compelled to ask: "Will you say a prayer for the soul of their killer?"

"Yes. But given my druthers I'd prefer to break his knees with a ball bat."

"That makes two of us." Ben gripped Maddingly's hand. "Thanks for calling, Monsignor. We'll assign a surveillance unit for the next forty-eight hours, just in case he tries to get to you or the cleaning lady. I'll need to talk with her before anyone else arrives."

"She's been taken to the convent."

"One more thing, Monsignor; I need to know about the legend of the dogwood."

"Is this part of the investigation? Never mind, I know—you couldn't say if it was. The legend goes like this: When Jesus was crucified some of his blood dripped onto the petals of a white flower growing at the base of His cross. The flower was so saddened by His suffering that it kept His blood on its petals to

remind the world that He tried to save it from suffering. That's why when the dogwood blooms it has a red spot on each of its three petals; to symbolize where the nails went through Christ's hands and feet."

Ben finished writing it down. "Thanks. I'm going to call this in and then—"

—the growling stopped him.

Low, guttural, and wheezing, from near the altar.

Instinctively, Ben pulled out his .45 and stepped back into the church proper.

The dog from the truck stop was sitting on top of the altar with its head craned back, staring up at the bodies. Hearing Ben chamber a round from the clip, it snapped its head down and glared at him, dark eyes clouding over into bright silver. Ben could see the two large, seeping bullet holes from where it had been shot; one in its side, one in the center of its head, and he knew that it had been dead when it ripped through the back of the trunk and attacked Sanderson and Wagner, and he knew that it was *still* dead—

—so how?

It bared its teeth and tensed its legs to pounce as Ben readied to shoot—

—but then it stretched low, threw back its head, and released the longest, loudest, most preternaturally mournful cry Ben had ever heard; it was the cumulative wail of a million broken-hearted men shrieking their anguish into an uncaring night coupled with the screams of a million babies doused in gasoline and set aflame; a rabid, ragged cacophony of fury and despair that shook the overhead beams with such force that the golden crucifix snapped loose and crashed onto the altar. The keening grew in volume and potency until the stained-glass windows began to rupture in spiderweb patterns, casting off sections of Mary, John the Baptist, St. Francis, and even Jesus Christ.

Maddingly pressed his hands against his ears.

Ben felt as if his bones were rattling loose as he leveled the gun and took aim at the dog—

—which ceased howling, gobbled up a mouthful of eyes from the chalice, and leapt into the aisle, disappearing within the rows of pews.

Ben stepped back into the sacristy to make sure Maddingly was all right.

The pipe organ in the loft over the main entrance suddenly began playing "Don't Get Around Much Anymore."

"What the—?" said Ben. Both he and Maddingly looked up and saw a shadow move across the loft so quickly that if either of them had blinked they would have missed it.

Maddingly shouted over the deafening music: "There are twenty-five hymns programmed into the organ's memory—and that isn't one of them."

The music suddenly lowered in volume—

—the now-unseen dog howled again—



—and machine-gun fire erupted from the loft, splitting one of the beams over the altar; it cracked in half and the two bodies came slamming down.

Ben plowed three shots into the loft but the machine-gun fire didn't stop; as the bodies struck the marble base of the altar a barrage of bullets bounced them like crazy puppets jitterbugging to the music.

Maddingly, pressed against the door of the sacristry, made the Sign of the Cross.

The strafing veered to the side and began shattering the solemn statues.

Ben took a deep breath, said a little prayer of his own (*Just let me get to the entryway*), bolted out past the altar, and hit the aisle running toward the loft, pumping round after round toward the flash of gunfire from above.

The machine-gun fire stopped abruptly and a dark shape appeared near the loft's rail.

"Does the flapping of a butterfly's wings in Brazil set off tornadoes in Texas?" it shouted—

—then flung itself out the large window next to the organ.

Ben slammed through the double oak doors and burst into the bright sunlight.

Before he was halfway to the sidewalk he saw the two crucified bodies in the yard of the convent, each nailed to their cross with railroad spikes; one spike through each hand, another through both feet. Both were naked except for the small section of torn and blood-stained cloth tied around their waists.

Ben swung left, then right; the broken glass of the organ loft window lay scattered about but there was no sign of whoever had jumped through it.

Still holding the .45 in front of him, he walked slowly toward the crucified bodies, oblivious to the screams of passersby and the screech of tires as shocked drivers slammed on their brakes, some colliding with others; the howl of twisted metal, the belch of shattering windshield glass, cries of panic and disgust and horror.

Ben felt the tears on his face but made no move to wipe them away.

Nailed above the head of each body was a piece of wood into which letters had been burned.

The one on the left read *EL*.

The one of the right, *HAC*.

He stared up into the dead glinting coin eyes and felt the world surrender to madness. He felt helpless. Useless. It happened so fast, too damn fast and there wasn't a thing he could do about it so what the hell good was he anymore—

—so Ben Littlejohn stood there, screaming inside.

He had been like this once before, three years ago.

Cheryl was in her seventh month of pregnancy. Both she and Ben had been anxious since the beginning; their two previous attempts had ended in miscarriage. But, as difficult as this third pregnancy was, it looked as if it might happen this time.

He'd come home from work to celebrate his promotion and found the downstairs lights turned off.

"Cheryl?" he called.

And was answered by a low, pained groan from overhead.

He took the steps three at a time, calling her name all the way.

He burst through their bedroom door.

Cheryl was flopped onto the floor. Her color was hideous and she was sweating and shaking. She looked at him and coughed up a small spray of blood and mucus that slopped across her cheek. Ben ran over and knelt down, trying to be gentle as he began to move her but she shook her head and placed a trembling hand against his chest, her eyes moving to indicate the phone receiver swinging back and forth from the bedside table and he asked, "Did you already call?" and she nodded, wincing from the pain as he touched her face, felt how *cold* it was, then kissed her forehead and began to lift her back onto the bed but he didn't have the balance, the angle was all wrong and he slipped and both of them tumbled to the floor and Cheryl threw back her head to scream but couldn't, the pain was that intense, and as the sound of approaching sirens sliced through the night Ben stared helplessly at his wife's straining vocal cords and thought: *If she can just scream then she'll be all right* but no sound would come as Cheryl hitched, spasmed, spit up more blood and lost consciousness and then the paramedics came out of nowhere and shoved Ben away, two of them going to work on Cheryl while another readied the gurney.

The emergency room was a storm of rushing white lab coats as doctors and nurses rolled Cheryl into an exam room. Her EKG was erratic as hell and Ben felt less than useless as he watched the team go at his wife with stunning speed and efficiency, then before he knew what was happening a keening noise erupted and was quickly muted by a nurse as the doctor in the middle of the group grabbed a defibrillator—"Clear!"—and Ben pressed his hands against his mouth to squelch his cry as the electricity shot through Cheryl's body, causing it to convulse.

"Flat-line."

The doctor applied the paddles again—nothing. Ben felt a scream rising in his throat and choked it

Allen R. '93



back, watching numb and horrified as a scalpel appeared in someone's hand and swooped down like a buzzard, the incision made, the blood flowing, and suddenly the doctor had his hand inside Cheryl's chest, massaging her heart, and Ben caught a glimpse of white vein beneath membrane—

—“Oh, Jesus,” someone said—

—and he looked down to see something ooze from between Cheryl's legs, a sickening glop of purplish-black meat trapped in a crawling flow of blood, water, and something that looked like cottage cheese. He glimpsed part of a tiny face—

—the doctor shook his head and pulled his hands from Cheryl's chest—

—the silhouette of a nose, a section of chin—

—the EKG was snapped off—

—her body began to deflate, it seemed, like a carnival balloon—

—the room spun—

—and Ben pushed through the doctors toward his wife and child.

He saw his son's impossibly blue-black face, the strangling power of the umbilical cord around the neck, and something inside of him snapped, loosening fear and dragging wire hooks against the inside of his skin; he felt his knees start to buckle and fought to stay standing but the sensation was overpowering, he was nothing against it—

—looming overhead, something huge, something dark and vast and bigger than the whole goddamn planet, they were all buried in its shadow as it plummeted toward them and he wanted to look up but his body wouldn't move and he couldn't breathe because in moments he would be lying crushed on the ground, the thing about to slam on top of him like a meteor—

—he felt something brush his cheek then, the smallest of breezes, like a fly buzzing past—

—the fear passed, replaced by sudden, thundering grief.

He wept quietly for all the holidays he and Cheryl would never celebrate, for every disappointment she'd ever experienced, every joy that was dampened, every hope that was tainted, all the things she wanted to do but never did and now never would, he cried for all of it, screaming inside.

Later, as he sat in his car in the parking lot, Ben saw something that looked like a black butterfly on the windshield. Cheryl had always loved butterflies. He stared at it, saw the small white strip around the upper portion of its body that looked too much like the umbilical cord around his dead son's neck, and laid his head against the steering wheel, the sobs wracking his body.

It wasn't until the rampage in Cedar Hill was finally over that Ben remembered having seen the butterfly the night of his family's dying.

For all the good it did.

that, my torturer, was the night i first became aware of him.

i wasn't sure that he would do.

but that was just you trying to confuse me, wasn't it?

he'll do nicely.

8

As Ben and Goldstein approached the mayor's office the secretary looked up from his desk, buzzed open the office door, and shook his head in pity.

They entered.

The Honorable Rachel S. Moore was sitting behind her desk, one hand supporting her bowed head, the other holding a telephone receiver to her ear.

“Yessir, I understand. Tomorrow.” She hung up and gestured for Ben and Goldstein to sit down. “That was the governor. He's decided that you two couldn't find your butts with both hands and a search party, so he's calling the Feds at noon tomorrow—and the only reason he agreed to wait that long is because I begged him. I hate to beg, so I'm in a lousy mood, which means you'd better have something for me.”

Ben and Goldstein alternated their recitation of the events since the massacre at the truck stop. When they finished, Mayor Moore shook her head and asked Goldstein for a cigarette. “I don't give a shit if this is a smoke-free building.” She produced an ashtray from her desk and the three of them lit up.

She looked at Ben and said, “How long were you in the church?”

“Not more than seven or eight minutes. I have no idea where the crosses and bodies were hidden or how he could've gotten them up so quickly without being seen. When he jumped through the window I couldn't have been more than five seconds behind him but he was gone and the crosses were up. I've been trying to figure it out and it's just not possible. Granville Street is the most traveled in the city.”

“No chance the bodies could have already been there and you—”

“No way.”

“I didn't think so. I don't have to tell you how pissed the governor is, what with this being an election year. He doesn't want to call in the Feds any more than the rest of us but this has to be taken care of fast or he'll look bad. I guess he took pity on my begging—did I mention that I hate to beg?—and he agreed to make all facilities and personnel at his disposal available to us, including State Troopers and National Guard

units." She leaned forward and gave both men a hard, unblinking stare.

"One of the people crucified outside the convent was Esther Simms. That grand old woman practically raised me after my mother died." She rubbed her eyes and tried to smile. "I hope that if you get the chance to shoot this psycho you'll have the decency to fire an extra round into him for me."

Ben and Goldstein remained silent.

"What about the lab report and the coroner's office? Anything there?"

Ben cleared his throat. "We got a detailed report from the lab before we came over here. The coins in the eye sockets of all the victims . . . the minting dates coincide with the birth year of whoever they were . . . attached to."

"Jesus," said Mayor Moore. "How in hell could the killer know that?"

Goldstein said, "We wondered if the minting dates might also coincide with the dates of death on the new headstones in the old County Home cemetery, but they didn't."

"We've got three units stationed out there," added Ben. "They made a thorough search of the grounds but didn't find anything. Those headstones are heavy. He has to store them somewhere nearby."

Moore said, "You do have positive I.D. on all the victims, right?"

Ben exchanged a worried look with Goldstein, then said, "Sort of."

"What's that mean?"

"All bodies matched their identification and were positively identified by either friends or relatives, but the coroner followed routine and fingerprinted the bodies and . . ." He exhaled and cracked his knuckles.

"If you want my attention, you've got it, but my patience is getting a bit strained."

"According to the fingerprints the first half-dozen victims were Richard Speck, Theodore Bundy, Edward Gein, Charles Whitman, Herbert Mullen, and Juan Corona. Those're the only names I can recall without looking in the files, but every set of fingerprints identifies one of the victims as a dead mass-murderer. He had to have gotten into the system somehow, because as soon as the prints were run through a second time the whole thing shut down."

Rachel Moore lit another cigarette. "So he's a Sneaker. Wonderful. Anything else?"

"Just that the coins are whole silver and not sandwiched."

"Come again?"

Ben took a quarter from his pocket and showed it to her as he explained. "The U.S. Mint manufactures what are called 'sandwiched' coins for mass circulation. They stopped making whole silver coins before WWII. The majority of coins today are made of nickel and

copper." He pointed to the copper strip around the circumference of the quarter. "The coins attached to the victims were whole silver."

"Any ideas on that?"

"None."

The phone beeped. Rachel Moore pushed the intercom button. "What is it, Steve?"

"The station manager from WLCB radio is on the line for Captain Goldstein. He says it's an emergency."

She punched the line.

Goldstein listened for a moment, then said, "And this was how long ago? Can you run the tape for us? Yes, *now*." He looked at Moore. "We need the speaker. The killer phoned them about ten minutes ago. The DJ recorded the call."

A crackle of static came over the speaker, followed by a hiss, then the sound of Guy Donovan, Cedar Hill's favorite morning DJ: "WLCB request line. This is Donovan. What would you—"

"This is the person who visited the Buckeye Lake Truck Stop this morning, then left an offering at the Saint Francis de Sales Church."

"That was all on the news," said the mayor.

The killer: "I have a question for the police: Does the flapping of a butterfly's wings in Brazil set off tornadoes in Texas?"

"That wasn't," whispered Ben.

The killer continued, his words edged with a profound weariness, even sadness: "There are one-hundred-and-fifty-seven bodies buried in the old County Home Cemetery. I have placed headstones on fifteen of their graves for you, one in exchange for each person killed. I am willing to give you some time before I kill anyone else so Captain Goldstein and Detective Littlejohn can piece things together, but if anyone tries to take them off the case I will not hesitate to kill the remaining one-hundred-and-forty-two people that are needed for . . . balance."

"I believe that Detective Littlejohn took physics for a little while when he went to college, so he might understand about the flapping of a butterfly's wings in Brazil; a theory of chaos math, fractals and such, with just a touch of Markov's Chain of Disintegration. It'll come back to him soon enough."

"As for the letters found in the church and on the crosses, they spell 'Haceldama'. It's Hebrew, as I'm sure Captain Goldstein can tell you, and means 'The Field of Blood.'"

"I'm sorry about the people I've killed. And I'm sorry about the people I'm going to have to kill. I've spent an eternity being sorry, but for some, 'sorry' just doesn't cut it. Try apologizing to a baby being eaten away by cancer, or to an old woman whose family dumps her in a nursing home to die; try saying 'I'm sorry' to a country filled with starving people or a homeless man who freezes to death on a park bench."

You may offer your sympathies to the lonely and broken-hearted people who shamble through the ruined places of this world but, in the end, you'll walk away. Apologize, then walk away, and feel no responsibility whatsoever.

"That is part of the seed from which the black butterfly was born. And that is why you have to deal with me.

"You cannot protect yourselves.

"Ever.

"Only I can do that."

Click.

Rachel Moore looked first at Ben, then Goldstein, asking respectfully: "What the hell does he mean about butterfly wings? And Hacedama?"

"Physics was a long time ago," said Ben. "I flunked out of the course after one semester."

Goldstein raised his hands, palms-out. "Don't ask me about anything Judaism. I fell away from the faith when I was sixteen."

She considered all this for a moment. "All right. I'll need a copy of that tape for the governor. Is anyone checking the records at the new County Home? If there's some way we can identify the rest of those bodies—"

"—already doing it," said Ben. "We've got people at the Home, the court house, the county land office, and checking the burial register of every parish. A record has to exist somewhere."

"Providing someone thought to make copies and transfer them before the old Home burned down," said Goldstein.

"Yeah," said Ben, absent-mindedly massaging his throat.

you feel it, don't you, benjamin? the memory of your dream?

you're running through a dead field with tears in your eyes. your arms ache because you're carrying something heavy. your chest is crackling with anger, sorrow, confusion, and guilt. you want to be rid of it all.

*then you see the tree, you wake up choking . . .
. . . and remember the way your son looked.*

9

While Goldstein was inside getting the tape from the station manager, Ben sat in his car outside WLCB radio and tried not to surrender to depression; now that Cheryl was gone these all-too-frequent bouts were more than he could handle.

He reached into his pocket and removed the

picture of her that he always carried with him. It had been taken on their wedding day. God, she'd been so beautiful. Her gaze held everything for him; promise, possibility, passion. Ben found himself remembering every past nuance about the moment the picture was taken; the scent of her perfume, the slant of light, the bead of sweat that ran down his spine, the aroma of the flowers on the altar, the way she held his hand and squeezed it—not one long squeeze but a series of them, as if in rhythm with her heart, now his as well: *squeeze (I Cheryl take thee Benjamin to be my wedded Husband), release, squeeze (. . . to love and to cherish, till death. . .), release*, the two of them exchanging themselves with every pulse, every breath, each willingly bestowing something to the other until, at the moment the photograph was taken, they were no longer Ben and Cheryl but a one beyond Oneness. This day; this time; this breath; this love: Immortal.

Three years and it still ached.

To think about what Should Have Been.

His vision blurred for a second and he realized he was crying.

"God, honey," he whispered so low it was almost a prayer. "I miss you so much. Still."

Christ! He had to stop this.

Call in and see if there's any word on the burial records.

He put the picture away, then reached toward the radio—

—as the killer's voice sliced through the static.

"She was quite lovely, Ben. You're right to miss her so much."

"What the—"

"After you wake up from your dream, what happens?"

He snatched up the microphone. "How did you get on this frequency?"

"The rope burn that's around your neck for just a second. Remember? You have to be familiar with the term 'stigmata'."

"What do you want."

"Oro, fiat illud, quod tam sitio; Ut te revelata cernens facie. Visu sim beatus tuae gloriae. Amen."

A great pressure coiled around Ben's neck. He fell forward, gasping, his lungs screaming for air as the pressure intensified, crushing his larynx—

His world spiraled downward into darkness where—

—a man named Herbert Mullin killed thirteen people as a sacrifice to the gods, claiming the deaths would prevent earthquakes in California; during police questioning he hinted that the deaths had been "preventing other things" as well—

—into darkness where—

—Juan Corona took a machete and slaughtered sixteen migrant workers on his farm and claimed that the murders were "an act of holy preservation"—

—where—

—William "Theo" Durant strangled and mutilated four women of his parish in 1895, then dragged their bodies to the tower of Emanuel Baptist Church and hanged them by their necks, claiming their corpses would serve as "a reminder of God's anger against humanity for turning away from its fellow men."

Ben became Mullin and Corona and Durant, as well as Bundy and Geln and Whitman and others like them in the past, the present, and the future. He raped and mutilated, he flayed and cannibalized, he stared at victims from the scope of a rifle and bathed in their blood and clothed himself in their dead flesh—

—and every savage act was filled with release and redemption, for even though part of him knew the acts were unspeakably depraved, a deeper, stronger part sensed that the butchery was somehow preventing a final act of even greater violence and destruction.

Dum vista est, spes est: Where there is life, there is hope.

A motto for the smorgasbord of slaughter.

He clutched the steering wheel so tightly his knuckles began turning white. Staring ahead with the intensity of a man being led into the gas chamber, Ben remembered the voice of the killer over the radio, remembered looking at Cheryl's picture, remembered the pain that twisted through him before he'd black out—

—but he didn't remember coming to, or driving away, or even where he was going.

He was dressed differently—

—his hands looked so old—

—and his head felt so heavy—

—and this wasn't his car—

—so what in the . . . ?

He pulled into the parking lot of a public cafeteria. There were six cars, plus three semis, one of them hauling gasoline. He reached into his shoulder holster and removed a Colt Commander 9mm Parabellum with a nine-round magazine and special silencer attachment. He jacked open the chamber and inserted a tenth round, then shoved it back into his shoulder holster and put an extra clip in his pocket.

Pulling four sticks of dynamite from under the front seat and stuffing them into the lining of his coat, he wondered: *What the hell am I doing?*

buying time, came the answer. He looked in the rearview mirror. He didn't recognize his face.

Inside, the overhead lights were far too bright, giving the place a cavernous feel, accentuated by the pinging echo of silverware clattering through a dishwasher.

Three large men were sitting in a room at the far end marked: TRUCKERS ONLY.

He took a seat at the counter. The waitress was a

big old friendly gal named Margie who smiled through slightly discolored teeth and never stopped talking to the cook—a short, nervous-looking young man wearing a silver skull earring.

Two other waitresses were sitting at a far table. Probably on break.

A well-dressed man came out of the restroom and sat at a booth near Ben.

A small office window near the trucker's room revealed a stooped bookkeeper within.

Six vehicles, six people.

He turned and spoke (with the killer's voice) to the well-dressed man. "I've been thinking about Edward N. Lorenz, the mathematician-turned-meteorologist who opened up the field of chaos math. He applied certain convection equations to the short-term prediction of weather and watched them degenerate into insanity. He wrote: 'Does the flapping of a butterfly's wings in Brazil set off tornadoes in Texas?' Yes—because that seemingly harmless movement creates a small yet potent change in atmospheric pressure which interacts with other minute changes, and these combine with still more unpredictable variables that come down through the exo-iono- and stratosphere to mingle with the cumulative 'butterfly effects' in the troposphere, and before you know it—WHAM!—you've got thirty people dead in a trailerpark while hundreds more stand weeping among the ruins of their homes. And this can happen in seconds. Think about that. A Monarch flutters its wings, and in less than a minute chaos can come crashing down on your world and reduce it to smithereens."

"I don't know what you're talking about," said the man, "but I'm minding my own business, so why don't you—"

With a *snick!* from the Colt his face peeled back and slapped against the window, hanging in place for a moment before slithering down.

Margie came next, a shriek barely having time to escape her throat before the round punched through her chest, lifted her off her feet, and sent her wallowing backward into a row of metal shelves that groaned and buckled as their contents plunged to the floor with her in a bloody smack of shatterglass shower.

Cook Silver Skull hurtled sideways as the bullet demolished a quarter of his head, landing on top of the grill and convulsing as his blood sizzled and his flesh scorched and his body spasmed before he shit his pants and rolled onto the floor oozing and smoking.

Eight seconds had elapsed.

The two waitresses screamed and vaulted toward the doors but two quick *snicks* decorated the tables with squirming bits of their skulls and gray matter.

At fifteen seconds and counting the truckers were on their feet, one of them pulling an eight-inch Bowie knife and rushing full-force, screaming, "YOU PSY-

CHO-FUCK SON-OF-A—" A round *snick*/ed through his throat but he kept coming, arms pinwheeling as he spewed blood and tried to ram the knife home as he collided with Ben and they fell, the knife skittering under a chair.

Ben pumped another round, this one at a vicious angle, ripping up through the trucker's stomach and blowing out just above the tailbone dragging a gummy white loop of lower intestine with it.

Twenty-nine seconds.

The other two truckers had armed themselves with knives snatched from place-settings.

Snick!—one lost his balls and collapsed, screaming at the top of his lungs and clutching the soggy-meat hole between his legs.

The other one dove behind the counter, skidded in a puddle of Margie, and smashed through the kitchen door. Ben pulped his knees with two shots. The trucker hit the side of his face against a stove knob on the way down, tearing a thick gash from cheek to temple.

Ben grabbed him by the hair, dragged him to his feet, ejected and replaced the empty clip, put a fresh round through his chest and shoved him against the deep-fat fryer, ramming his face into the bubbling oil. The trucker managed to get his face out of the oil for a moment, its skin sloughing off like wax melting down a candle before Ben plowed two more shots through his back and he slumped forward, head submerging into the scalding pit as dozens of blackened french fries writhed around his skull.

Catapulting himself out the kitchen door with such force he wrenched the hinges out of the frame, Ben lunged toward the small office and blasted the window into a puking supernova of fractureburst fragments. Someone inside tried to choke back a moan as Ben kicked away the remaining shards of glass and climbed inside.

An old woman with palsied, liver-spotted hands was lying face-down on an adding machine behind a small metal desk, a phone receiver clutched against her chest.

Heart attack.

Ben held the receiver to his ear and heard " . . . aine County Sheriff's Department, is this an emergency? Hello?"

Jerking the phone cord out of the wall, he spun around and clamped the old woman's head between his hands, snapping it sideways and shattering her neck.

Back in the restaurant the last trucker was still screaming and clutching at the raw, gushing chasm where his nuts used to be but Ben walked past him and toward the entrance; one of the waitresses was still alive.

He grabbed the Bowie knife, flipped the girl onto

her back, and rammed the knife into her forehead. To the hilt.

He crossed the gore-slicked floor and straddled the last trucker's waist, pressing the gun into his cheek. Fifty-eight seconds.

Chaos rules.

"Getting back to the 'butterfly effect.' Human behavior is a lot like that—determined by pre-existing yet uncontrollable events which, when considered in the context of inviolable laws of momentum, completely account for all subsequent events. So what causes behavior to suddenly veer toward the self-destructive? The butterfly effect."

"P-p-please m-mister," choked the bleeding man beneath him. "... it . . . ohjesusgod . . . it hurts so . . . so m-much . . . please d-don't . . . kill me" He closed his eyes and began to whimper, then weep, fear and hysteria burrowing inward to a place beyond fear. "... don't wanna . . . die . . . I got k-kids who . . . ohgod"

Ben continued speaking in the killer's voice. "Imagine the butterfly is the embodiment of everything that causes us to ignore or add to the suffering of others, and the flapping of its wings is the force of our apathy spilling outward. In less than a second it combines with the myriad emotions we expel—anger, lust, happiness, despair, whatever—until they become a single entity. Multiply that by however many times a day a person turns away from the suffering of others, then multiply that by the number of people in the world, then multiply *that* by the seconds in a week, a month, a year or a decade, and pretty soon you've got one hell of a charge building up. After the point of maximum tension is reached the combined forces rupture outward and target who or whatever is closest at the time. Gives a whole new meaning to 'shit happens'."

"OHGODPLEASEMISTER—"

Snick!

Blowing out its pilot light, he shoved two sticks of dynamite under the gas stove and lit their extended fuses. Outside, he shoved a stick halfway into the tank of the gasoline truck, another under the semi next to it.

Two minutes later, when he was almost six miles down the road, the cafeteria went up in a titanic mushroom-cloud blast that roared two hundred feet into the air and sent shockwaves rippling over one-third of the county. Debris rose so high it took almost ninety seconds to come back down.

Staring in the rearview mirror, Ben saw the flame-cloud assume a very appropriate shape.

A blink and a breath, then he said: "Two thousand days more."

And was answered by an echo:

that was nebraska. september of 1977. look it up if

you want. just a snapshot from the scrapbook of my memory. hope you appreciated it.

With a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach, Ben realized that he had.

10

He awoke to pain, bright light, and the sound of many people rushing by.

He was on a bed behind a plastic green curtain.

A hospital emergency room.

Monsignor Maddingly: "Are you all right? Al said you had some kind of seizure."

Ben swallowed once—it hurt; twice—a little less; three times—still uncomfortable but he could live with it. "How long was I—"

"A little over two hours."

"Where's the Captain?"

"Called away on some kind of emergency. Said he'd try to get back."

Ben sat up and pressed his hand against his head to stop the dizziness. "W-what're . . . what are you doing here?"

"I was administering Extreme Unction to a patient when you were brought in. Al told me about the tape and it triggered a synapse in this old brain. Let me ask you something—did all of the bodies have coins in place of their eyes? Silver coins?"

" . . . yeah . . . ?"

"Fifteen bodies?"

"Yes."

Maddingly nodded his head.

"What?" said Ben.

"You were baptized in the Catholic Church. Think about it: fifteen bodies, two coins each—"

"—thirty pieces of silver." Ben touched his still-tender neck.

"Judas Iscariot," said Maddingly.

"Then, the Field of Blood—"

"Haceldama. The potter's field in Israel where Judas was buried in an unmarked pauper's grave. To this day no one knows the exact location of that field. Thousands of bodies buried there, and nothing to mark the spot."

The curtain was yanked back and Goldstein stepped through, looking as if he hadn't slept in a week. "The dead have arisen."

Ben asked, "Where did you go? What happened?"

"All fifteen bodies disappeared from the morgue. Right in the middle of the autopsies. There was a blackout, some kind of small boiler explosion, the building was evacuated, and by the time the coroner's

team went back inside the bodies were gone. The building was empty in less than twenty minutes."

"What did you do?"

"Christ!—sorry, Monsignor—what *could* I do? I had Moore phone the governor and request some help. Every available cop is on the street and this guy is playing 'Ring Around the Rosey' with us. There is no doubt in my mind now that he's capable of killing as many people as he claims. And that scares the hell out of me. So the National Guard comes in and Cedar Hill goes under curfew." He ran a hand through his hair and looked out at the doctors and nurses and the suffering patients with wounded souls.

"Al?" said Maddingly. "What is it?"

"Just tired, I guess. Thinking about . . . things."

"Like what?"

Goldstein turned toward Ben. "I never told you how sorry I was about Cheryl, did I? But I was. I am. She was a fine woman."

" . . . thanks . . ." whispered Ben, wondering what the hell was on his captain's mind.

Goldstein watched a woman holding a towel against her bleeding face roll by on a gurney, then sighed. "I used to listen to my father tell stories about the camps. He saw his parents die at *Gunskirchen Lager* in Lambach. I got so sick of him going over and over the details, as if the only reason he was allowed to survive was so he could become this living memorial tape loop. The only time he ever really acknowledged my existence was when he needed an audience for his perpetual eulogy. One day I screamed 'I'm sorry I wasn't there. I'm sorry you had to see it. I'm sorry I haven't suffered and died like they did so you'd love me, too.' He never spoke about it again, but the ghosts stayed with him. That's why I fell away from the faith and left home: I couldn't stomach the sight of what his faith had done to him. He wasn't my father, he was a repository for phantoms. Every time I saw those ghosts in his gaze I felt diminished. So I walked away. I didn't even go back for his funeral.

"The thing is," he said, turning to face Maddingly and Ben, "sometimes I look in a mirror and catch a glimpse of his ghost in my own eyes, and I wonder if we're not all just walking graveyards, our memories serving as coffins for all those we've seen die, and the people they saw die, and the people *they* saw die. I'm six months away from retirement and I just"—his voice cracked—"can't . . . look at it anymore. It feels like this guy . . . this *thing*, has beaten us. And if he has . . . if he has . . ."

A nurse stepped in and said she had a call for Ben at the desk and the caller had said it was an emergency.

Ben stumbled his way to the desk and lifted the receiver.

"How was Nebraska?" said the killer. "Figure anything out yet? I hope so—"

"—wait a second, I—"

"—because your time's up. Meet me at cemetery in fifteen minutes. Come alone."

"There're cops stationed there, you know."

"They've been called away on an emergency."

"What do you—"

Just as the line went dead a patrolman rushed to the desk, trying not to shout as he said, "A call just came in from downtown, sir. We got a sniper."

so, my torturer, here we are again. will you divinely intervene, or will this end the same way as all the times before?

like benjamin and his captain, i, too, have been thinking about things.

the caterpillar that crawled into my mouth as i hung there. how it slipped down my throat and made its cocoon inside me.

caiphas had his servants cut down my body and bury it along with the coins of my so-called betrayal. then, as the season changed, the traditor papilio emerged from me.

how terribly clever of you to stigmatize it.

your son's blood marked the dogwood with holiness.

my death marked the black butterfly with disgrace.

and the rest of it . . .

you really outdid yourself.

have you ever asked yourself if they really deserve this?

i didn't think so.

time is short. dum vista est, spes est.

11

The storm clouds were already gathering by the time Ben got there. Low rumbles of thunder were accentuated by vivid flashes of silent lightening that dazzled his eyes and seemed to dance across a nearby pond, turning it into a sheet of fire before everything pitched into darkness. A blink and a breath, then his gaze recovered from the preceding flash, enabling him to see the tendrils of mist rising from the graves, twisting and coiling.

The .45 gripped tightly in his left hand, he climbed out of the car and ascended the small hill that led to the cemetery proper. Goldstein hadn't been crazy about Ben coming out here alone but the situation downtown was serious, eight people had already been wounded—but none, thank God, had yet been killed.

"Why didn't it ever occur to us that there might be two of them?" he'd asked as Ben started the car.

"Damned if I know."

"Thirty minutes," said Goldstein. "If I don't hear from you by then, sniper or no sniper I'll come to get your ass and bring three units with me."

"You'll hear from me."

Goldstein had grabbed Ben's arm, then, and said, "You be careful. Don't fuck with him. I hate heroes, got it? They're mostly all dead."

Ben had nodded then driven away as Goldstein and Monsignor Maddingly (who insisted he go to the scene, perhaps he could talk the sniper down) climbed into a squad car.

Ben checked his watch.

He had nineteen minutes.

At the far end of the grounds, near a foot trail that had once led all the way around the place, a lone mercury vapor lamp came on, its murky light coming downward to illuminate a thin figure hunched over a shattered headstone.

Ben jacked a round into the chamber and moved slowly forward. His breath was staggered and heavy and he couldn't shake the feeling that he and this figure weren't alone.

Another burst of lightning spiderwebbed across the sky and Ben had to bite his lip to keep from crying out.

Suspended from various trees surrounding the cemetery, some hanging by their necks, others by their ankles, still others impaled on the ends of jagged branches, the bodies stolen from the morgue dangled, pale, naked, gutted angels. Their opened, empty chest cavities looked like the gaping maws of giant insects. Flesh flaps swayed in the rising wind; faces no longer capable of further expression were frozen into grisly smirks; and arms devoid of conscious impulses swung witlessly back and forth as if beckoning him forward.

Ben took a deep breath and strode onward.

The figure rose to its feet.

Ben froze mid-stride and almost choked. "... oh God . . ."

"Hello, my love," said Cheryl.

One thousand days of cumulative grief, loneliness, anger, and confusion instantaneously welled up in Ben's chest, shaking him within and without. He lowered the gun and tried to move but couldn't, part of his mind screaming that this wasn't happening, it couldn't be true, and as he worked his mouth and jaw to form words that refused to be articulated his wife moved toward him, her smile filled with Spring, her arms parted for his embrace, and Ben Littlejohn suddenly didn't give a damn about the killer, all that mattered was Cheryl, who was here, who was real, who was his life and reason and oh God she was so close, he could smell the scent of her skin, tender and sensual as the horror of the last eleven hours faded, the taste of one thousand days of bitter longing withered, and the chaos that had so long been the core of his exist-



ALLEN K. '93

ence turned in on itself and hinted at order.

He lurched toward her, tripped over a section of headstone and dropped to one knee, then, through a veil of near-blinding tears, wrapped his arms around her waist and buried his face in the center of her torso as the sobs exploded.

"... ohjesus baby I've missed you so much so much ohgod I love you I missed you I need you so much..."

"Shhh, there, there," she said, stroking the back of his head. "It's almost over now."

"... love you so much..."

He began to stand, blinking the tears from his eyes—

—she was gone.

And there, at his feet, at the corner of the headstone, was the black butterfly he'd seen this morning.

The killer's voice echoed: "When Hannibal arrived at the gates of Rome he saw the black butterfly resting there, and knew his victory would be futile. What good is it, after all, conquering a city that would fall to flames anyway?"

Taking in a deep breath filled with steel, rage, and snot, Ben snapped up the gun and clenched his teeth.

"Where are you?" he whispered.

"Turn around," said the killer.

He was much smaller than Ben had imagined but it was easy to see, even through the shabby clothes he wore, that his body was tight and powerful; layers of sinewy muscles rippled whenever he moved.

His eyes, so clear and startlingly blue, nailed Ben to the spot; they were the most haunted he'd ever seen, brimming with ghosts. So many, many ghosts.

"Hello, Ben."

"What did you do with Cheryl? Goddamnit, where's my wife?"

"Nearby. Don't worry, you'll see her again."

Ben raised the gun, pointing directly between the killer's eyes.

"Shoot if you want, but it won't do any good. I've tried it so many times it's almost funny."

"Who are you?"

"I'd have thought that was obvious by now." He smiled then; a wistful, tired expression that turned his wind-burnt face into a mask of lattice-work lines. "So, are you going to use that thing, or what? Nice gun, by the way."

Ben glanced quickly and saw the .45 shimmer in his hand, then turn into the Colt 9mm Perabellum he'd held in the Nebraska dream.

It was a testament to his professional composure that he did not throw it down.

The killer shook his head and walked past Ben, kneeling down by the headstone and extending his hand. The butterfly moved toward it on dozens of tiny insect legs until it nestled securely in the center of the

killer's palm.

"If you want Cheryl back, Ben, you won't pull that trigger."

"Who's your partner?"

"My *what*?"

"Your partner! Who's the sniper?"

"Oh, right. His name's Randy Perry. He's a mechanic from Heath who's been getting treated for depression. He'll manage to shoot seven more people before the SWAT team takes him down. They'll check into his background and find enough evidence to link him to the truck stop killings. Case closed. Another chapter for the Time-Life 'Serial Killers' books."

"How do you know that?"

The killer stood, cradling the butterfly in his hands.

"Have you ever said or done anything that you later regretted, Ben? Of course you have, who hasn't? You wish you could take it back but you can't. A loss of control in a moment of confusion or weakness or anger and suddenly you've contributed to the damage in the world. It's out there, it's done, and you can't change it.

"When you were attending Catholic school, did anyone ever ask your Religion teachers that classic smartass question: 'Can God create a rock so big that even He can't lift it?' Well, He can.

"On the day Christ died God's rage was so overwhelming that He lost His mind for a moment, and in that moment he created a day when the world would end. He spit out that day and sent it flying into the universe where it still waits. And He can't take back that day, He's tried. So there you have that 'rock' so big even God can't lift it.

"From my corner of Purgatory I screamed at Him not to punish the world for the wrong I had committed. 'The sin is mine!' I cried. 'Let the suffering be mine, also. Torture me, not them!'

"So He sent me back. It took a long time but eventually I realized the nature of my punishment. Do you remember thinking 'two thousand days more' after the killings in Nebraska? That's how much time those deaths bought. By killing those nine people I put two thousand days between us and the end of the world."

Ben, repelled yet fascinated, asked, "Was there a cemetery near that place?"

"Half a mile away in a farmer's field were nine hoboes who'd been beaten to death by railroad men in 1931 and buried without being identified. There was nothing to mark their grave. No one knew they were there. Still don't, as a matter of fact."

"So for each person who dies and is buried without a name or anything to mark their grave—"

"—I have to kill a person whose death will be noticed, whose grave will bear their name, whose

friends will weep and whose family will remember them. It helps to restore the balance of pain and thus postpones the . . . end of everything."

The storm clouds dropped lower, churning and thundering and flashing jagged lightning as Judas Iscariot parted his arms toward the cemetery. "There are hundreds-of-thousands of places like Haeeldama, like this place, all over the world, with new ones being dug every hour. It didn't take long to understand there was no possible way I could maintain the balance of pain on my own.

"So I begat Bundy and Whitman and Corona and Gein; Cowan and Gacy and Berkowitz and Haarman; Gilles de Rais and Starkweather and Rojas and Speck and countless others, some of whom won't even be born for another fifty years. Their tallies add to the time the world has left."

"How do you know?" shouted Ben. "What proof do you have?"

Judas tensed his jaw, his eyes narrowing as his voice became a deep, grieving, deadly whisper. "Do you see this?" He held out his hand to show the black butterfly. "A species of *lepidoptera* so rare it has been classified as extinct for over a hundred years. Its Latin name is *traditor papilio* - 'betrayer butterfly'. Also called the 'Judas Moth' because of its white strip, symbolizing the rope burn around my neck after I used the cattle-halter to end my wretched life. There are only thirty of them in existence, one for each piece of silver I accepted. They can only be found on unmarked graves—they were born in one, so they are drawn to the same. They move by crawling. They never flap their wings. They are indestructible but capable of unbounded destruction."

"The 'butterfly effect'?" asked Ben.

"Taken to a hideous extreme. The day will eventually come when all thirty of them will go back to the place of their birth. Once gathered upon my grave they will simultaneously flap their wings, and next will be Nothing. Unimaginable Nothing. Vengeance, as the saying goes, will be the Lord's."

The gun held limply at his side, Ben whispered, "Why me?"

Judas shook his head. "Can't answer that one. I don't do the choosing. The butterflies do. I simply. . . beget."

"Why the theatrics, then?"

"I have found, over the centuries, that chaos helps to speed up the . . . I guess you'd call it the recruiting process. And, as terrible as it sounds, it amuses me to watch how people react. If that sounds cold-blooded I won't apologize. After ten thousand years I'll take my enjoyment when and however I can get it. You simply cannot think of them as people, merely a means to an end."

Ben stared at the spot where his wife had stood

just a few minutes ago, trying to deny all of it.

"You have more of a conscience than most," said Judas. "But, being a policeman, you will also have more opportunity and freedom." He stood next to Ben, his long gray hair blowing backward, and placed a hand on his shoulder. "So I will promise you this: for every death at your hands you will be given one hour with your wife and son."

" . . . son?"

"Your son. As he would have been had he lived."

The first spattering of rain began to fall on their heads. The sky was fracturing.

"Come on, Ben," said Judas, looking toward the sky. "There is no more time for you. You can't help Al or Maddingly or anyone else now. What's done is done. This is why you were born."

"Your wife and son, Ben. And the continued stillness of butterfly wings."

12

Ten days later most of the Midwest was still talking about the tornado that all but leveled Cedar Hill. One-hundred-and-twelve people were dead, and the count was expected to be higher once the clean-up was finished.

Such was the subject under discussion by Phil Dardis of Cedar Rapids, Iowa as he and his wife packed themselves and their three kids into their station wagon, pulled out of their clean suburban driveway, and drove toward their big family reunion picnic twenty-two miles away.

Fifteen minutes later, right smack the hell in the middle of a country road lined on both sides with dense trees, they came upon a young, good-looking priest whose car had died on him. Despite his wife's protests, Phil, a good Catholic all his life, pulled over to give the priest some help.

"Is there something I can do for you, Father?"

"Reverend, actually, and yes. I'm afraid my fan belt snapped. Could you do me the kindness of driving me to the nearest phone?"

"Of course. There should be one at the park. That's where we're heading."

"Lovely family."

"Thank you. Here, let me help you with that. Don't wanna leave your bag out here where someone could grab it. Lucky for you we came along. Not many folks drive this road, too out-of-the-way. Whoa—this bag's pretty heavy, Fath—uh, I mean, Reverend."

"Church decorations. I'll take it if you can't—"

"Shit! Oops, sorry. Darn thing came open and—what the hell?"

"I'll take that."
 "Jesus, wait a second!
 You ain't no—hold it! JESUS
 GODDAMN CHRIST LUCY
 GET OUT OF—!"

It was a few hours later before he saw them standing by the side of the road. Ben pulled over and flung open the door. Cheryl climbed in first, then Jimmy. They had to fumble around the guns and rifles and other weapons, but that was okay, they were finally reunited. There was a lot of crying and kissing and hugging and rejoicing.

Cheryl told Ben that if he wanted to make love they'd have to find a place soon, they only had five hours and oh by the way the Dardis family bought another ninety-eight days and where did you get that big gray dog in the back seat Jimmy just loves it.

Ben nodded his head and said the dog's name was Calphas and it was a gift from a friend. Then he stared out at the road and thought five hours with his family wasn't enough.

Forty minutes down the road they picked up a couple of hitchhikers before getting on the interstate—New-Agers with crystals around their necks and one of those ersatz-Native American backpack things to carry their baby in.

Ben smiled later as he tossed their heads into a rest area dumpster.

It was all worth it; and it was good.

Here, with his family; to have the time.

"Look," said Cheryl, pointing at a patch of flowers. "What a beautiful butterfly."

— CD

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CD REVIEWS

BOOKS, VIDEOS, SOFTWARE...

Lovedeath, by Dan Simmons, Warner Books, Nov. 1993, 336 pp., hc, \$19.95, ISBN 0-446-51756-9

To those readers and critics who prefer their genre boundaries remain unblurred, Dan Simmons's work remains a constant source of frustration. His last two novels, *Children of the Night* and the unjustifiably overlooked *Hollow Man*, proved that his fiction cannot be pigeonholed. I cannot emphasize this point too strongly, for not only does Simmons continue to blur the lines that separate one form of storytelling from another in this new collection of five novellas, he gleefully subsumes all genres in each story. In the hands of a less skilled writer the results would have been wildly uneven and perhaps even embarrassing, but Simmons never once falters. The result is *Lovedeath*, a collection that contains the most assured, compelling, and passionate writing Simmons has yet produced.

The title of the collection is the American translation of the word "liebested" which appears in Act II of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (which Simmons discusses in the very personal Introduction). Taking as his catalyst the link between love and death which has often underscored all of his work,

Simmons has consciously layered the tales to create the fictional equivalent of a five-act opera, approaching "liebested" from a variety of viewpoints in hopes that some useful parallax will emerge. How well he succeeds in the end will be a question for each individual reader to answer for themselves. For me, he succeeds gloriously, despite the disparate nature of the five tales (something that may put more than a few readers on the defensive).

The collection opens with "Entropy's Bed at Midnight" (previously released in an expensive limited edition from Lord John Press), an eloquent, funny, and heartbreaking tale that manages to not only make one painfully aware of the universe's indifference to human vulnerability, but manages to humanize chaos theory. (It also, in my opinion, serves as a thematic bridge between *Phases of Gravity* and *Hollow Man*.) If this sounds a bit erudite it's my fault, not Simmons's; this tale of an insurance claims adjuster whose job experience has made him fear for his daughter's safety almost to the point of paranoia is simultaneously sad, hysterically funny, and horrifying; imagine Camus' *The Stranger* if Buster Keaton had filmed it as a three-reeler.

Next comes "Dying in Bangkok", the most outrightly horrific of the tales and Simmons's last comment on AIDS in our age. A Vietnam veteran who is now a successful doctor returns to the city of the title to track down a woman whose sexual services he and a buddy purchased during the war. Simmons admirably avoids the clichés associated with an AIDS vampire story to offer a tale that, while dark and often bitter, emerges as angrily triumphant.

"Sleeping With Teeth Women" follows, a story that is Simmons's anti-*Dances With Wolves*. This long narrative, told in first-person by an aged Lakota Sioux, is mythic in its unfoldings and breathtaking in its results. The bold imagery common to most Native American folk tales is used here to great advantage in the legend of Lane Badger, a Lakota youth who becomes the reluctant Messiah of his people when he's only trying to get laid. His journey toward his destiny is thoughtful, fascinating, often genuinely funny, sensual, and ultimately inspiring, encompassing its own themes as well as those explored in the two previous stories. It also (while displaying Simmons's talent for assuming the speech patterns of a different culture) introduces the

element of prophetic dream-visions which figure heavily in the last two stories, like the reprise of a musical theme (I told you that the book unfolds like an opera).

"Flashback" is the most overtly political story Simmons has yet written. Sometime in the future, after America has fallen to an economic apocalypse, the population has become addicted to a drug called "flashback" which enables the user to re-experience with all senses intact any chosen moment from their past. But this longing for the past has become a sickness. Though it is the shortest tale here, it is perhaps the most complex—not so much in what it presents as what it implies.

And finally there is "The Great Lover", easily the most accomplished piece of short fiction Simmons has ever written—and I do not say this lightly. To call it a ghost story would be an oversimplification. This journal of a fictional soldier/poet at the Battle of the Somme during World War I has harrowing violence combined with moments of moving tenderness as it depicts the experiences of James Edwin Rooke, who finds himself being visited during battle by the spectre of a white-gowned woman. He believes that she is Death but, as with everything in this rich and rewarding piece, that is not the case. It is a fitting and wondrous finale to Simmons's thematic prose-opera.

Poignant, savage, mythic and lyrical, the stories composing *Lovedeath* prove once and for all that Dan Simmons is one of the greatest storytellers of our time. It is not to be missed by anyone who treasures the experience of reading a superb writer at the height of his powers.

—Gary A. Braunbeck

Borderlands 3, edited by Thomas F. Monteleone, Borderlands Press, hc, \$65 Signed, Limited Edition; \$20 Trade Edition

In Ed Gorman's stark and unforgettable "The Ugly File", one of the twenty-one tales contained in *Borderlands 3*, the narrator says of another character that they are "... trying to make frantic sense of the silent and eternal universe that makes no sense at all." Those words unintentionally portend what lies at the core of this collection, which might as well be subtitled: *Stories That Take On the Cosmos* because just about every known and unknown is grappled with in these pages; love, familial obligations, religious faith, the Id and the Ego, human loneliness, alienation, violence, the parasitic relationship between the media and the mass psyche, perversity, God, science, creativity, and ultimate answers to the question of humankind's very existence.

Piece of cake—or, rather, that's how Monteleone and company make it appear, thanks to the editor's careful layering of the tales and the writers' passion for their craft. As with the two previous installments of the series (*Borderlands 1* contained stories in the symbolic vein, *Borderlands 2* veered toward the Expressionistic), this collection reveals its common denominator early on.

To those writers and readers who constantly bemoan the death of Fable Fiction as it was crafted by writers such as Rod Serling, Richard Matheson, Charles Beaumont, and Jack Finney, there is good news: with *Borderlands 3*, Monteleone and company have not only resurrected the fable as a viable and unquestionably powerful storytelling form, but may very well be the harbingers of its renaissance. What makes it such an impressive—and arguably remarkable—achievement is that the writers were given *carte blanche*, yet all have

produced stories that—despite their often phantasmagorical trappings—are at their heart, fables. Don't worry about being assaulted by didactic diatribes, for none of the writers climb on a soapbox.

As with any anthology, how the individual stories hold up are a matter of personal judgement. What follows is a handful of the tales I found most memorable.

Elizabeth Massie's "Brazo de Dios" gets things off to a disquieting start. Set in a nameless Third World country where savage security forces roam the land, it concerns a nun who is taken hostage by a mysterious man who may or may not intend to torture her to death. Her crisis of faith—an element Massie obviously knows is a tired cliché—is handled deftly and affectingly. The final confrontation between the nun and her captor will blind-side you. Massie doesn't often employ the supernatural in her fiction, but does so here to great advantage. This story more than matches her Stoker award-winning "Stephen".

J.L. Comeau offers the first of two tales that deal with the effects of electronic Vulture Culture, "The Owen Street Monster." What is at the surface a story about how tabloid journalism begets rampant paranoia among the blissfully ignorant of suburbia slowly reveals itself to be a cautionary tale of the highest order, one that will make you think twice the next time you feel like laughing at the headline of *The National Inquirer*.

The late Avram Davidson gives us "The Man Who Was Made of Money". In what is (I believe) his last short story, Davidson—a past World Fantasy Award winner—offers a wry and chillingly satirical look at Yuppidom. Never has the old adage "Leave 'em laughing" been more appropriate. This wonderful story is an eloquent and humorous coda to Davidson's life and magnificent career.

Marthayn Pelegrimas offers "Baby Sue, We Love You!", a rich and upsetting story which explores the flip-side of the "fifteen minutes of fame" — not so much the fame itself, but what comes after. A devastating meditation on how pain not only affects but may very well shape our lives.

The collection closes with Whitley Strieber's "Horror Story", which is (and I do not say this lightly) one of the most genuinely nightmarish tales I have ever read. Written with such frenzy it borders on the chaotic, "Horror Story" left me (literally) shaking. It tackles Big Questions in a Big Voice and never falters. That a key element of it is drawn from Strieber's well-publicized personal experiences (detailed in *Communion* and *Transformation*) only adds to its feverish power. This story disturbed me on a deep level, and I think it's safe to guess it may have the same effect on other readers. It will most certainly be remembered at next year's Stoker and World Fantasy Awards.

And there you have it. If the third time is indeed a charm, then the *Borderlands* series has absolutely nothing to worry about. It will continue to be to this decade what Charles L. Grant's *Shadows* was to the last: the definitive anthology series.

—Gary A. Braunbeck

Justice For Some, by Kate Wilhelm, St. Martin's Press, 1993, 260 pp., \$18.95, hc (ISBN 0-312-09319-5)

Recently, in the pages of a small press genre publication, I read a review of Peter Straub's novel *The Throat* wherein the reviewer stated that "... Straub has taken the traditional mystery into the twenty-first century with his brilliant fusion of the psychological, the surreal, and the supernatu-

ral ... (*The Throat*) not only encompasses all that has come to be associated with the modern American mystery, but rises far above any- and everything that has come before ..."

Not to detract from Straub's achievements (I am a tremendous admirer of his work) but it seemed to me that the aforementioned reviewer would not have made such a bold statement had they ever read Kate Wilhelm's work, for she was paving the way for novels such as *Mystery* and *The Throat* while Straub was still lurking Under Venus.

Kate Wilhelm is easily one of the four or five most versatile writers working in any genre today. From such award-winning novels as *Where Late The Sweet Birds Sang* to the elegant mainstream *Fault Lines* and the impressive scope of stories in her recent collection *And The Angels Sing*, Wilhelm is a one-writer force, an author whose storytelling skills and love and mastery of language reach new levels with each successive work.

No less formidable is her newest novel, a mystery entitled *Justice For Some*. Though Wilhelm has already firmly established herself as a top-notch mystery writer with her Charlie Meiklejohn/Constance Leidl series (not to mention the riveting Chaos-theory novel *Death Qualified*, a novel to which I think both Straub and Dan Simmons owe a small debt of gratitude), her mysteries, while embracing many traditional whodunit trappings, always transcend the genre (like everything else she writes). *Justice For Some* finds her as challenging, and as skillful, as ever.

Judge Sarah Drexler, a widow of three years, suddenly finds her life in an upheaval when she's asked to run for Oregon State Judge. Confused and lonely—and more than a little shaken by hints that her late husband was "bought and paid for" by a powerful local politico—she heads off to a family

reunion in East Shasta, California. But all is far from well: her father has hired a detective for reasons he won't divulge, her son is keeping a secret and so is her daughter, and one of her father's employees, a refugee from El Salvador, gets an obvious case of the willies whenever Sarah is around. Add to this that her uncle (a scientist who came within a hair's breadth of winning the Nobel Prize in genetics) is seemingly turning into a rabid megalomaniac, and you've got the Family Reunion From Hell (an effective and affecting element that has turned up in more than one of her books).

When her father and the detective turn up dead shortly after her arrival, Sarah has to face some tough questions: is her son and/or daughter capable of murder? Would she withhold evidence to protect her family name? And if and when justice is served, whose justice is it?

Readers who think they're in for a nice, cozy little Agatha Christie romp will have more than a few jolts waiting for them. Those who have no patience with the "traditional" mystery will find themselves blindsided so often their heads will spin — after getting past the deliberately and deceptively easy-going opening chapters.

Drug-running, horticulture, the smuggling of illegal aliens over the Mexican border, familial tensions, real-estate scams, radical DNA research, the fine line that separates honor from ego, and a particularly frightening patch of quicksand in the center of a supposedly haunted lake, are just a brief smattering of the disparate elements that Wilhelm seamlessly (and un-self-consciously) combines to create a tight, suspenseful, compelling plot that builds to a stunning climax involving a sniper in the hills outside a ghost town. Her characters are richly realized and expertly developed with intelligence, compassion, and humor;

one hopes Wilhelm will bring Sarah Drexler back for other novels.

Fans of Peter Straub, Dean Koontz, Robert McCammon, and Dan Simmons would be well-advised (not to mention further enriched) to seek out and read this, or any Wilhelm, novel.

If you're already a fan, then *Justice For Some* will only add to your admiration of this exquisite author. If you're among the uninitiated, don't stay that way: read *Justice For Some*; you'll be hooked for life.

—Gary A. Braunbeck

The Book of Webster's, by J.N. Williamson, Longmeadow Press, 1993, \$17.95, hc (ISBN 0-681-41598-3)

When you pick up this novel—Williamson's thirtieth, and his first in hardcover—you will be immediately struck by first its colorful, eye-catching cover, then by the praise-heavy blurbs that appear on the back of the jacket from such notables as F. Paul Wilson, Rex Miller, and Rick Hautala—all of whom are excellent writers . . . but they evidently read a different book than the one I did, because they talk about what a nightmarish, relentless, horrifying trip through hell the story is, and I suppose that if you start this superb book expecting to be terrified, you will be.

There's just one thing.

It's funny. Not just laced with humor to relieve the tension funny, but tripled-up with laughter, tears in your eyes, somebody-grab-an-oxygen-tank-because-I-can't-breathe funny. Imagine *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* as it might have been made by Buster Keaton and you'll have some idea of what to expect from this quirky, stylish, tense and nearly unique novel.

Yes, it's about a pair of serial

killers: Dell, a forty-year outcast who believes that the dictionary has mystical powers, and Kee, a fifteen-year-old pollyanna from hell who's been waiting for "the man of her dreams" to come and whisk her away. (The allusion to Charles Starkweather and Caril Fugate is intentional, as are the countless other nods to those fun-loving mass-murderers we've all come to know and love).

Webster's is laced throughout with acidic cynicism, and more than once you may find yourself wondering if Williamson doesn't have his tongue planted firmly in—and maybe even through—his cheek. For instance: in the opening sequences of the book, we meet Dell's psychiatrist (one of the most memorable characters in the book) who starts off as the embodiment of the old horror staple, the psychiatrist-who's-crazier-than-her-patient, and rapidly becomes a gateway to the surreal. She and Dell have a long conversation about how the downfall of civilization will come because men have opposable thumbs that reads like a cross between Harold Pinter and Burns & Allen. It's as if Williamson is warning the reader that, yes, this novel will deliver several genuinely horrific scenes, but mostly I'm going to take you through a *Grand Guignol* play that's turned into a vaudeville routine.

For the record, the novel was expanded from the 1986 novella of the same name that originally appeared in *Twilight Zone's Night Cry Magazine* and came within one or two votes of making the final ballot for the Nebula Award. Unlike most novella-into-novel expansions where the original piece appears early in the proceedings, the bulk of the original story doesn't appear until nearly the end of the book, giving Williamson time to layer the characters' pasts and give you a real feeling for the charred and jagged remains of their intellectual landscapes. For as many

intentional guffaws as this book contains, you can't help but be impressed by Williamson's sometimes clinical, but more often dead-on knowledge of the sociopathic personality.

The only element of the book that may put a few readers off (at least initially) is the narrative voice. Both Dell and Kee are borderline-illiterates who think and speak in mangled English ("I ain't gotta do nothin' you say no-how!"). For dialogue this is fine, but when the same speech patterns start popping up in the narrative sections of prose, it's a bit confusing at first; almost as if Dell or Kee had decided to write a fictionalized account of their adventures.

Then you realize that *that* is the point; the sometimes impenetrable narrative style is Williamson's jab at those tawdry, true-life crime books that drown the paperback shelves: *I Was Charles Whitman's Dry Cleaner*; *Ted Bundy Once Asked Me For Directions*; *Jeffrey Dahmer Used To Buy Spatulas From Me*.

You can't help but admire a writer who layers his satire.

I don't think torture, dismemberment, and bloodletting has ever had this many laughs.

If you miss out on *The Book of Webster's*, you will be missing out on what is easily one of the year's most unique horror novels; tense and terrifying, certainly, but even more than that, it is the blackest of comedies, told with flamboyant style and razor-sharp wit.

Noel Coward with a chainsaw.

Williamson has deserved wider recognition for quite some time; his last novel, *Don't Take Away the Light*, was a quiet, wondrous, Bradburyesque tale that should have created more of a stir than it did (and if you can still find it, by all means buy it and read it and be moved by the power he finds in a simple ghost story). I could list at least a dozen other Williamson novels that deserved

equal recognition but—because of no publicity, bad distribution, pathetic cover art, or the depressing fact that many in the field still look down their noses at paperback originals—never found a readership. I hope *The Book of Webster's* earns this vastly underrated writer the large audience he deserves.

—Gary A. Braunbeck

Mr. Murder, by Dean Koontz, Putnam Books, \$23.95 (ISBN 0-399-13874-9)

Mr. Murder will undoubtedly continue Koontz's current streak of appearances on the national Bestseller Lists. In fact, this is probably the most suspenseful book to come along since Harris's *The Silence of the Lambs*.

Marty Stillwater is a successful mystery writer whose career is just beginning to reach *National Bestselling Author* status. He is also a loving and devoted family man with a wonderful wife, and two adorable daughters.

One day, while dictating into a tape recorder, Marty experiences an apparent *fugue*, a sort of mental blackout where a person may sound and act normally, yet later will have no recollection of what they said or did during that period of time. When Marty replays the tape, he hears his own voice take on a menacing tone as he repeatedly chants *I NEED . . . I NEED*. Before he can reach a logical explanation for the fugue, Marty begins to feel an overpowering premonition of danger, as if some devastating force is inexorably bearing down on him and his beloved family. This feeling is so strong, that Marty decides to take the precaution of loading his small collection of guns and hiding them strategically throughout the house.

Upon his return from an appointment with the family doctor,

Marty is confronted by a nearly-identical look-alike who demands the return of his wife . . . *His children . . . HIS life*. Marty manages to shoot the intruder with one of his hidden guns, but instead of being incapacitated by the serious gunshot wounds, the intruder leads Marty on a terrifying and suspenseful hunt through the house.

In their next confrontation, the stranger nearly kills Marty on the second floor balcony before both men plunge down to the tile floor of the foyer. Once again, the intruder manages to escape after suffering what appear to be fatal injuries.

When the police speculate that the entire episode may be nothing more than an elaborate publicity stunt to coincide with Marty's feature in *People* magazine, Marty is left with little choice but to take his family on the run.

And as the story unfolds, we learn that the intruder has far more in common with Marty than simply an uncanny physical resemblance.

Mr. Murder is probably one of Koontz's darkest novels thus far. He also re-examines a couple of themes from earlier books: the misuse of high-tech science for bizarre purposes as in *Watchers*, and how ordinary people can sometimes rise up to battle a nearly invisible menace as in *Dragon Tears*. Koontz hates to have his work categorized, and whether through precise career planning or through unconscious stylistic refinement, he has literally created his own subgenre of suspense wherein seemingly supernatural occurrences are ultimately explained by logical, scientific means. Other authors will undoubtedly attempt this refreshingly original format, but will probably find that succeeding with this type of story is more difficult than Koontz makes it appear.

The book is fast-paced, and thoroughly entertaining. The climax is satisfying and believable,

although perhaps just a tad bit too convenient. I always feel slightly manipulated when a character's actions at a crucial moment seem to be contrary to what I've been led to expect from this character during the course of the story.

But this is a relatively minor criticism. All things considered, *Mr. Murder* is a genuine suspense masterpiece, and you'll have a hard time finding a more enjoyable novel currently on the shelves of your local bookstore.

—Roman A. Ranieri

A Flash of White, by Andrew Vachss, Crossroads Press, Box 10433, Holyoke, MA 01041-2033, \$13.00

First of all, I'd like to preface this review by saying that I greatly admire Andrew Vachss. Not only do I enjoy his gripping, tersely-written novels and short stories, I also respect Vachss for his monumental crusade to bring child-abusers to justice. Everyone *talks* about the pitiful state of the world, but precious few actually make an effort to help change things.

A Flash of White is literally packed with entertaining features, beginning with an introduction by Joe R. Lansdale, who boldly declares his own high regard for Vachss' work. After the introduction comes an article by Vachss entitled *Sex Predators Can't Be Saved*, which originally appeared in *The New York Times*. Next, we have the powerful short story "A Flash of White," concerning a supposedly-cured sex offender out on parole. This fellow just happens to have a hobby: spying on the women in the apartment tower across the street with a telescope. Of course, in his opinion, all the women are filthy whores who should be taught a lesson. The one who enrages him the most is the woman in 16-F because she keeps

her blinds closed, allowing him only a flash of white which he assumes to be her panties. Eventually, he decides that she must be *punished*. He breaks into her apartment only to realize that *white* can sometimes be a dangerous color.

The short story is followed by a comic adaptation script by Rose Dawn Bradford. The third and final version of the story is a reproduction of the comic as it originally appeared in issue #6 of Dark Horse Comics' *Hard Looks* series.

Anyone considering the possibility of writing for the sometimes lucrative comics industry would find this chapbook indispensable as a guide for scripting; you can also see how the artist interpreted the written words into a visual story.

The next signed chapbook from Crossroads Press will be another Vachss story entitled *Drive By*, which will feature an introduction by Neal Barrett Jr. and a comic adaptation by Joe R. Lansdale. This series is highly recommended.

—Roman A. Ranieri

Glimpses, by Lewis Shiner, Morrow Books, \$21.00 (ISBN 0-688-12411-9)

Glimpses is one of those books that probably had to overcome steep odds just to reach publication. This is because the majority of editors working at the large publishing houses become utterly lost and confused when presented with a novel that doesn't quite fit into a comfortably familiar category such as mystery, science fiction, or horror.

Shiner's *Glimpses* is a marvelous blend of science fiction, nostalgia, and a touch of autobiography. Members of the baby boomer generation will feel genuine pangs of recognition. This is a coming-of-age novel for an age that even in retrospect, still seems somewhat in-

comprehensible.

Ray Shackelford is a burned-out stereo repairman, locked in a deteriorating marriage, and suffering from a severe case of father angst. When Ray's father accidentally drowns, Ray is haunted by nightmares caused by powerful emotions of hatred left unexpressed.

Ray soon discovers that he can mentally enter a world of virtual reality where he can produce famous recordings that don't actually exist; recordings like the Beatles' legendary album "Get Back" and The Doors' "Celebration of the Lizard." As he becomes more proficient at this new-found, time-travel phenomenon, Ray meets and speaks with dead rockers like Jim Morrison, Brian Wilson, and Jimi Hendrix. Finally, even managing to confront his dead father.

At its core, *Glimpses* is a fascinating novel of self-discovery that should touch a personal note of recognition in nearly every reader. This is the most original and unique book I've read in years.

—Roman A. Ranieri

The Shark-Infested Custard, by Charles Willeford, Underwood-Miller Books, \$20.95 (ISBN 0-88733-163-7)

It is a rather sad twist of fate that Charles Willeford's work didn't achieve a widespread popularity until relatively late in his career. I'm certain that given more time, Willeford would have treated us to many more grim, gritty, and decidedly *weird* novels.

The Shark-Infested Custard is not as cohesive as Willeford's other novels. Which isn't really surprising considering that it consists of four interconnected adventures of four inhabitants of the Dade Towers, a singles-only apartment complex in Miami. Part #1 was

originally published as "Strange" in the story collection *Everybody's Metamorphosis* in 1988. Part #2 was first published as "Kiss Your Ass Goodbye" in 1987. These were limited edition hardcovers from the private press of Dennis McMillan. The third and fourth parts are original to this Underwood-Miller edition.

Willeford's view of urban life in Miami is violent, decadent, absurd, and often hilarious. The escapades of bachelors Larry Dolman, Eddie Miller, Don Luchessi, and Hank Norton, begin with their placing bets on picking up a woman at the local drive-in and bringing her back to Dade Towers. But the jokingly-made wager abruptly ends when the woman turns up dead.

If you are a fan of the sullen *noir* style crime fiction of James M. Cain, you should definitely enjoy *The Shark-Infested Custard*.

—Roman A. Ranieri

Criminal Intent #1, stories by Marcia Muller, Ed Gorman, and Bill Pronzini, Dark Harvest Books, \$21.95 (ISBN 0-913165-69-7)

Paul Mikol, the guiding force behind Dark Harvest Books, is evidently not the sort of person to waste a good idea. With the *Night Visions* horror series currently in hiatus, Mikol has decided to begin utilizing the same trilogy concept to showcase notable writers of the mystery genre.

The first novella, "The Wall" by Marcia Muller, features San Francisco private investigator Rae Kelleher. Since 1989, Kelleher has appeared as a supporting character in five of Muller's *Sharon McCone* novels, but this story debuts Kelleher in her first solo case.

When her teenaged daughter, Adrian, fails to return home from a supposedly ordinary day at high

school, Mrs. Conway calls the police. After two agonizing weeks of searching and following up slim leads, the police still have no clues as to the girl's whereabouts. Near desperation, Mrs. Conway asks All Souls Legal Cooperative for assistance in the search.

Kelleher begins her investigation with a visit to the missing girl's home. While examining Adrian's bedroom, Kelleher discovers an odd collage of magazine clippings and sundry objects that nearly covers one entire wall. From the strange and somewhat disturbing juxtaposition of both idyllic and ugly images, Kelleher senses that Adrian is troubled by some internal problem much more serious than simply trying to accept her parent's recent divorce. Kelleher soon finds herself searching the dismal, often shocking underworld of San Francisco's legion of runaway and dropout teenagers. But Kelleher quickly realizes that only by deciphering the graphic code of the collage, will she find the final clue to Adrian's fate.

Next, in "Moonchasers", Ed Gorman takes a nostalgic rural approach to the teenage years. Tom and Barney, a pair of friends growing up in the small town of Somerton, Iowa, are roaming around the countryside on a hot, summer afternoon in 1958 when they accidentally stumble across the hide-out of a wounded bank robber. As it turns out, the fugitive is not such a bad guy after all, certainly more admirable than Detective Cushing, Somerton's resident crooked cop and town bully.

The harrowing chain of events that follow abruptly initiates the boys into the adult world of betrayal, brutality, and greed. But ultimately they also learn of the immense courage it sometimes takes to do the right thing.

The final novella is "Kinsmen" by Bill Pronzini, starring his well-known series hero *The Nameless Detective*. This story also con-

cerns the sudden and mysterious disappearance of a beloved daughter. In this case, college student Allison Shay and her new boyfriend are driving from the University of Oregon to the San Francisco Bay Area to visit her mother. When the couple fail to arrive, Marian Shay calls the police. As expected, the authorities come up empty-handed, forcing Marian to hire *The Nameless Detective*.

Nameless begins his search in the remote northwestern corner of California where the couple was last seen. Marian's last contact with Allison was a telephone call from the tiny village of Creekside, where the couple had to stay overnight due to car trouble. *Nameless* quickly discovers that the inhabitants of Creekside are anything but friendly, and don't care much for outsiders. Could one of the danish folk of Creekside be responsible for the couple's disappearance? And what about the secretive boyfriend, whose identity is unknown even to Allison's mother? Or is there perhaps a dark and sinister secret hidden in this remote area that someone might be willing to kill for?

From what seemed like the simple disappearance of irresponsible young lovers, the detective slowly unravels the complex web of a dark-hearted conspiracy.

All three stories in the premiere volume of *Criminal Intent* are compelling and beautifully-crafted. If subsequent offerings can maintain this high level of quality, Paul Mikol will have another highly successful series on his hands.

—Roman A. Ranieri

The Forbidden Zone, by Whitley Strieber, Dutton, 309 pp., \$21.00, hc, ISBN 0-525-93683-1

Once upon a time, Whitley Strieber used to be one of my fa-

vorite authors. His early work — *The Wolfen*, *The Hunger*, *Black Magic*, *The Night Church* — was excellent; back then, Strieber had a knack for taking some of the genre's most overworked denizens (vampires, werewolves, etc.) and finding a new, interesting twist to work with. Then came *Communion* (which was, ironically enough, his breakthrough novel) and all the hoopla and media attention which surrounded it. After that, Strieber's writing just wasn't the same; it was as if his encounter with the "aliens" had somehow stripped him of his ability to write entertaining fiction.

I don't know exactly what it was that made me read *The Forbidden Zone*, but I'm glad that I did. This is Strieber the way that I remember him: daring, wildly creative, and nearly impossible to put down. Strieber has said that *The Forbidden Zone* is his homage to H.P. Lovecraft (to whom the book is dedicated), as well as his latest attempt to write the scariest book ever written. In my opinion he's come very close to achieving the latter goal; through skillful use of implied terror, over-the-top shocks, and an unrelenting sense of weirdness, Strieber has fashioned a horror novel unlike anything I've read in quite some time, one which, on more than one occasion, actually scared me. I can't think of any other recent horror novel (with the exception of Robert Harris' *Fatherland*, which disturbed me for wholly different reasons altogether) which has done that to me, which has delivered those glorious chills I remember feeling the first time I read classics like King's *The Shining* or Matheson's *Hell House*.

The Forbidden Zone's title is derived from quantum physics (a forbidden zone is an area around a highly energetic object which normally can't—and shouldn't—ever be entered, a place where everything changes and chaos

reigns), a field of science which figures quite prominently in this book's plot. Dr. Brian Kelly, a brilliant physicist, had been experimenting with breaking the space/time barrier when a tragic accident (the death of his wife and daughter in a fire) cuts his career short. After recovering from the extensive burns he received in the fire, Kelly settles down to a quiet new life with his new wife (a Vietnamese refugee) on farmland his family has owned for generations in the small town of Oscola in upstate New York. Unbeknownst to Kelly, his colleagues at a nearby university have continued his experiments, and that they've succeeded in ripping a hole in the space/time barrier, a hole through which something has stepped. Strange events begin to occur in Oscola: flickering purple lights are glimpsed in the woods; screaming people are discovered buried alive in the earth, somehow still alive despite the fact that their bodies are shattered; seemingly sentient swarms of fireflies whose touch brings both pleasure and pain; and beneath it all, the sounds of something burrowing beneath the earth. Eventually realizing that what is happening to Oscola is linked to his old experiment, Kelly and a handful of other survivors set out to make things right again. In order to do that, though, they have to survive first, which is no easy feat; like all life forms, this new visitor to our reality also wants to survive, and it's more than capable of fighting back at anyone who attempts to prevent it from doing just that.

In *The Forbidden Zone*, Strieber has blended together Lovecraftian themes with *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*-style paranoia (Is he one of us . . . or them?) for a truly nail-biting read, a book which succeeds in being both creepy and gross, scary and revolting (and, at times, brutal). It's a must-read book, one which no horror fan

should miss. Highly recommended.

—Mike Baker

The Darker Saints, by Brian Hodge, Dell/Abyss, 414 pp., \$4.99, pb, ISBN 0-440-21113-1

The Darker Saints, Brian Hodge's latest novel, updates two old horror standards—voodoo and zombies—finding some new and interesting uses for them in the cutthroat world of big business (and the criminal underworld) in the process. It is, after all, an arena where the person with the edge tends to come out on top, and what more of an edge can you ask for than the ability to manipulate the voodoo gods—the darker saints—so that their supernatural powers benefit you, and wreck havoc upon your foes, and anyone foolish enough to cross you.

The Darker Saints is also a sequel of sorts to Hodge's 1991 novel *Nightlife* in that two of the book's main characters figure prominently in this one as well: Justin Gray, a young advertising executive with a conscience, and his new wife, April Kingston-Gray.

In addition to an interesting plot, and well-rounded believable characters (things I've come to expect from Hodge's work), *The Darker Saints* also features what is perhaps the most unique, and hilarious, torture sequence I've ever encountered. Hodge has come up with a particularly fiendish (and bloodless) method to get someone to talk, one which is guaranteed to send shivers of fear down the spines of cat-haters everywhere.

My only real complaint about *The Darker Saints* is one which I'm sure some people won't agree with; what I found weak about the book is, I'm sure, its biggest strength in some people's eyes. What I had problems with is the fact that, for

the most part, characterization takes precedence over plot in *The Darker Saints*. Don't get me wrong; this book has an interesting, original plot, it just isn't plot-driven. Hodge seems more interested in carefully defining the characters than in progressing from plot point A to plot point B. Everyone, even the villains, is fleshed out to a great degree, with frequent glimpses at their inner-most thoughts. As a result, the characters come across as real people, not clichés, and that's good. On the other hand, there's so much soul-searching and revelatory flashbacks that pacing suffers, especially near the end of the book; rather than picking up speed and racing to a climax, like *Nightlife* did, it sort of meanders through a series of resolutions which, while satisfactory, still left me craving more. The ending of *The Darker Saints* is kind of like real life in that everything isn't wrapped up all neat and tidy, with all the loose ends taken care of. If this is the kind of effect Hodge was attempting to achieve, he did an admirable job of it, even if it didn't mesh all that well with my personal tastes.

Brian Hodge's continued growth as a writer becomes more and more apparent with each novel. For example, let's compare *Dark Advent* (1989) and *The Darker Saints*. The former is rather pulpy, and reads like Brian Hodge trying to be Stephen King (it also has a rather silly *deus ex machina* ending involving an earthquake). There isn't any attempt at imitation or emulation with the latter, though; Hodge has grown beyond that stage as a writer and is now content to just be himself, to leave the homages to other writers. *The Darker Saints* is pure Brian Hodge, through and through, and is well worth checking out. Recommended.

—Mike Baker

Wet Work, by Philip Nutman, *Jove*, June 1993, 262 pp., \$4.99, pb, ISBN 0-515-11115-5

Wet Work is the debut novel by Philip Nutman, whose non-fiction work you've likely seen in *Fangoria*, *Gorezone*, and other horror-related publications. Based on the short story of the same name which appeared in *Book of the Dead*, Skipp & Spector's award-winning 1989 anthology, *Wet Work* the novel tells the story of what happens when the comet Saracen passes close by the Earth, bathing the planet with radiation which causes the newly dead to rise up and chow down on human flesh (just like in the Romero *Dead* films which served as the inspiration for that anthology). The comet also causes a second plague, one which mutates common diseases like the cold and the flu into deadly super-killers. And then there's the kicker: a handful of living dead come back with intellect intact; with the exception that they have a body temperature of 25 degrees and a craving for really raw meat, they're just like you and me.

While I enjoyed *Wet Work*, I couldn't help but wish that it had been longer and a bit better thought out. Nutman's got a great premise for an epic novel, but none of the depth which that particular type of book possesses. Sure there's a lot of characters, and we keep jumping back and forth between them, but with the exception of Dominic Corvino, a CIA killer with a conscience, and Nick Packard, a young cop with a drinking problem, you never really get to know them. They live, they die, they live again, and through it all you don't really care because they're not real. While some of the characters may bear the names of Nutman's friends, they lack their namesakes personalities; by-and-large they're just hastily-slapped-together pawns to be played with,

then fed to the zombies (or die of the super flu). There's no sense of the big picture with *Wet Work*, the reality of the situation. It's more of a series of isolated incidents, and while that style might work in the context of most novels, it just doesn't cut it in epic fiction.

Then there's the logic and proof reading/editing flaws. Now I can live with the occasional misspelled word, but errors which appear not once, but repeatedly, really tend to annoy me. For example, the name of the gun is an Ingram MAC-10, not Ingram, as it appears throughout the novel. *Wet Work's* internal logic is a little dicey, as well. I can swallow the idea of intelligent zombies (it is Nutman's world, after all; who says he has to keep things just like they were in the Romero movies), but there should be some sort of internal logic with regards to them and their less-bright kin (which there isn't). The explanation given for the discrepancy is that some people simply adjust to being dead better than others. Okay, but they're still zombies, so the rules which apply to the lesser ones should apply to the smart ones as well. On more than one occasion, the lesser zombies are shown to be next to invulnerable due, in part, to the fact that they don't feel pain. Shooting off a zombie's arm won't faze it; all it really cares about is clamping its teeth around your warm flesh. The thing is, the smart zombies feel pain. For example: in a climatic fight between a zombie-fied Corvino and another smart zombie we are told straight-out they're hurting each other ("The nerve endings in his left arm were sending intense messages to his brain. He tried to ignore the pain." "Corvino's arm was burning with white-hot pain."), even though that contradicts what's been established earlier in the novel. These kind of logic/conti-

nunity errors I can live without.

Also worth noting are the blurbs which appear on the front, back, and inside covers of *Wet Work*. There's three from Clive Barker, two from Skipp & Spector, two from Nancy Collins, two from Shaun Hutson, one from Stephen King, one from Douglas Winter, one from Kathe Koja, and one from *Fangoria*. Examine these blurbs closely, though, and you'll notice that, while they're all laudatory and praise-filled, they don't say anything about the book they're affixed to. The King and the Skipp & Spector quotes refer to the short story, while the others refer to either Nutman, or his writing in general. It's not that Nutman isn't deserving of praise; he'd already established himself as a journalist long before he ever wrote his first piece of fiction. The thing is, there's a big difference between journalistic writing and fiction writing, and praise garnered for one really shouldn't be used as a selling point for the other. When Clive Barker says, "Philip Nutman has brought a fresh eye and deep enthusiasm to the business of horror" and "The genre is much enriched by his insight and creativity", it seems pretty obvious (to me at least) that he's talking about Nutman the journalist. If *Wet Work* were a collection of Nutman's non-fiction pieces, that blurb would fit right in. But it isn't, and it doesn't, and that's that.

All that's really left to say about *Wet Work* is that, as first novels go, it is a pretty good, and enjoyable, book, even if it does have its share of flaws. Nutman shows definite potential as a fiction writer, and I hope he devotes more of his time in the future to this particular writing venue. Recommended.

—Mike Baker

Close To The Bone, by Lucy Taylor, Silver Salamander Press, 1993, \$35.00 (hc), \$10.00 (tpb), illustrated by Mark Brill.

Edward Bryant writes the introduction to this latest collection of short stories from Lucy Taylor, a writer who has become known for her intense erotic horror fiction. The introduction is largely an appreciation of Taylor's work, a building of the expectation of something great. Ultimately, Bryant says that Lucy Taylor comes through with this collection. He is right.

Ten stories are included in *Close To The Bone*, some of which have not been previously published. All of the stories have erotic elements, some subtle, some outrageous. The eroticism gives the collection a cohesiveness, while the variation in the level of sexual content shifts the focus pleasingly and so avoids repetition. How many times have you read a short story collection to find, somewhere between the halfway point and the end, that you get the feeling you have been there before, that you've read the story earlier in the book? Not so here. You can take *Close To The Bone* in one sitting and never feel even the urge to skim a single story. Each one is new and fresh, and each one is disturbing.

It is difficult to choose a favorite story, but I am going to do it anyway. "The Family Underwater," probably the shortest piece in the book, stands out because of its elegant use of metaphor. The first sentence: "It was soon after my fifteenth birthday that I came home from school one day to find that our frame house on the corner of Monument Avenue and Malvern Street had filled up with water all the way to the second-floor ceiling."

No, it isn't a flood. Only the house has water in it, the rest of the neighborhood is completely normal. The other members of the

family don't seem to notice the bizarre turn of events and they continue to act normally. Well, normally for the family in question, anyway. The story is a fantasy, but the reader knows exactly what is going on here without being beaten over the head with a "message." The story is tight, the resolution is crushing. "The Family Underwater" exemplifies Lucy Taylor's talent for getting under your skin, for showing the reader painful dilemma and shattering revelation. The impact of this story will stay with you for a very long time.

Quite a lot of Taylor's short fiction has been published to date, all of it entertaining and sometimes even enlightening, and a great deal more will surely follow. Lucy Taylor has proven herself to be an important factor in the horror fiction genre. *Close To The Bone* is a wonderful showcase of her talents, the limits of which remain undefined.

—Wayne Edwards

Vampire: The Masquerade (ISBN 1-56504-029-5)

Werewolf: The Apocalypse (ISBN 1-56504-027-9)

Mage: The Ascension (ISBN 1-56504-065-1)

By Mark Rein-Hagen and Stewart Wieck, with assistance from others. White Wolf Publications. \$20.00-\$25.00

Vampire: The Masquerade is the first in a series of Storyteller Role Playing Games from White Wolf Publications. The concept here is simply that the player gets to be the vampire; rather than being forced into the somewhat tired position of playing a human that hunts down the monster, you *are* the monster. *Vampire* admittedly takes much of its flavor from the *Vampire Chronicles* by Anne Rice.

Adding to the problems that any vampire suffers—i.e. feeding on human blood, burning in the sunlight—the premise of the game is that you are a new vampire and that the older and more powerful vampires are still running the show. The feel of *Vampire* is very Machiavellian in nature. As often as not you are forced to do the dirty work of your masters. The true task and the true horror of the game is built around the complications that arise as you try to decide which of the elder vampires is telling you the truth, and which of the elders you will follow, if any.

Werewolf: The Apocalypse is the second of the Storyteller RPG's and is decidedly more action-oriented. As with *Vampire*, *Werewolf* allows you to play the "monster," and again gives the reasons for why Werewolves act towards humans the way they do. The Werewolves are out to defend Gaia—the Earth Mother—from the clutches of the Wyrms—entropy and corruption—and the battle is one that is being lost. The Wyrms' favorite pawns in the battle to defeat Gaia are humans, normally more than willing to sacrifice many of their own beliefs for a quick dollar. In many ways, *Werewolf* is a more spiritual game, too, taking much of its flavor from the philosophical and religious beliefs of the Native Americans. As with *Vampire*, the game is steeped in the history and philosophy of the werewolves from their own perspective, and the history that is shown often times reflect our own.

There is a hidden message in almost every supplement for *Werewolf*, ranging from the dangers of child abuse to, naturally enough, the dangers inherent in the destruction of the Amazon Rainforests. The message is there, but is not blatantly hammered into anyone's skull, just offered as something to contemplate.

Mage: The Ascension is the third in the series, and deals with

modern day sorcerers trying to prepare mankind for a state of perfection, a time when all will ascend to a new level of existence. There are different types of Mages, and each has a different belief as to how to best prepare the world for the upcoming ascension; therein lies the story. *Mage* is more celestial in its goals than either *Vampire* or *Werewolf*, but no less horrific in the problems that arise. Conflicts between the various groups of Magi are only the first problem to be faced; there are other, darker forces out there, and they want the Mages destroyed before they can bring about ascension.

Two more games are soon to follow. *Wraith*, a game where you play the dead and learn of their own unique problems, and *Changeling*, where you play a Faerie desperately trying to get home, back to Arcadia. Additionally, White Wolf has plans for starting a general fiction line based on their games, and has plans for releasing non-related fiction in the horror field in the near future. Pick a game, give it a try. You won't regret the decision. Even as reading material (rather than as a role playing game), the games are worth the read, just for the interesting histories presented.

—James A. Moore

The Honeymoon Killers (A True Story): Video Treasures, 1970.

These days, "true crime" stories are everywhere: on the bookshelves, on prime time television and even on the big screen. They have become an entertainment staple in America. Unfortunately, most of them, in any medium, are slapped together quickly and smack of lurid voyeurism and have been given little or no serious thought. As a result, they have no character, and rather than being

repulsed by the "true crime", we, the audience, are committing a crime by wasting our precious time on work that was done with nothing more than a quick buck in mind. That's why you should run out and rent *The Honeymoon Killers*—it's a breath of fresh, although very disturbing air.

Made in 1970 for about two dollars and eighty cents by writer/director Leonard Kastle, it stars Tony Lo Bianco and Shirley Stoler and looks more like a documentary than a "docu-drama", which is why this movie packs such a punch. Stoler plays Martha Beck, a hulking Alabama nurse with a permanent scowl who answers a "lonely hearts" ad in the newspaper. This leads her straight to Raymond Fernandez (Lo Bianco), who romances her in some of the more bizarre scenes ever filmed. Beck and her Latin lover then begin a trip across the country answering more lonely hearts ads... but this time, not for love. Fernandez romances women, then he and Beck kill them once they've sucked every cent out of them like vampires sucking blood.

The stark black-and-white cinematography, the tinny sound and rather garish music blend together beautifully to create a feeling not often found in movies. None of the people in front of the camera are attractive; the mood is unpleasant; everything about the movie rings so true that it's more like watching the *real* story play out in front of you rather than a low-budget movie. The ugliness of *The Honeymoon Killers* is sometimes reminiscent of a John Waters movie, but there is real talent here, not just a sick sense of humor. And yes, it is a true story, based on one of the more sensational multiple murder cases in the history of crime.

Even if you don't like "true crime" stories, you should rent this one for the sheer oddity of it. It truly is unlike any other movie

you've ever seen. Stoler's performance is worth the rental. Every time she picks up a piece of food and begins stuffing it into her mouth, she walks away with the movie! Anyone currently in the habit of making those boring-as-hell "docu-dramas" for network television could learn a lot by sitting down to watch *The Honeymoon Killers*. If they did, I might actually watch the Movie of the Week once in a while.

Double-Bill Suggestion:
Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer

—Ray Garton

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